

Karlsson, Pia; Mansory, Amir

## **An Afghan dilemma. Education, gender and globalisation in an islamic context**

*Stockholm : Institute of International Education, Department of Education, University 2007, xx, 381 S. - (Studies in international and comparative education; 72) - (Dissertation, Universität Stockholm, 2007)*



### Quellenangabe/ Reference:

Karlsson, Pia; Mansory, Amir: An Afghan dilemma. Education, gender and globalisation in an islamic context. Stockholm : Institute of International Education, Department of Education, University 2007, xx, 381 S. - (Studies in international and comparative education; 72) - (Dissertation, Universität Stockholm, 2007) - URN: urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-226485 - DOI: 10.25656/01:22648

<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-226485>

<https://doi.org/10.25656/01:22648>

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Studies in International and Comparative Education

72

# **An Afghan Dilemma: Education, Gender and Globalisation in an Islamic Context**

**Pia Karlsson & Amir Mansory**



Institute of International Education  
Department of Education  
Stockholm University  
2007

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ISSN 0348-95-23  
ISBN 978-91-7155-513-7

Cover photo: Eva Wernlid  
Layout: Martin Schibbye

Printed in Sweden by  
Intellecta AB, 169 03 Solna

Distributor:  
Institute of International Education  
Department of Education  
Stockholm University  
SE-106 91 Stockholm, Sweden

Telephone: +46 8 16 20 65  
Fax: +46 8 15 31 33  
Homepage: [www.interped.su.se](http://www.interped.su.se)

# Abstract

## An Afghan Dilemma: Education, Gender and Globalisation in an Islamic Context

Pia Karlsson & Amir Mansory

Afghanistan has a long history of Islamic education while Western type of education (*maktab*) is of more recent date. The latter type of education has expanded rapidly recently. However, girls' enrolment remains low, around 35 per cent.

The present study examines children's, particularly girls', participation in the two educational systems. Throughout history three conflicting issues are apparent in Afghan education: state control over Islamic education, the role of Islam in education, and girls' participation. A case study approach has been adopted, providing an analysis of how history and the present globalisation processes affect current education, and how students, parents and teachers in two villages perceive the changes. The focus has been on capturing the meaning attached to education.

The findings indicate high expectations on education as a vehicle to peace, enhanced morals and living standards. The traditional *madrasas* have declined, other forms of Islamic education have emerged. The Mosque schools are neglected by education authorities but highly esteemed by villagers. Concerns are expressed with the amount of time in *maktab* and with the quality of learning. The Islamic concept of *farz* (obligation, responsibility) puts both types of education in high demand.

Dilemmas are associated with choosing between Islamic and Western type of education, applying *farz* to girls' education and the encounter between Islam and globalisation. Two folk theories, one on globalisation and another on *farz* in education, were formulated as a basis for the further analysis. Worries are articulated about preserving Islamic values and ethics. Although 'globalisation' is a never heard of concept, villagers know some of its features, e.g. secularisation, individualism and consumerism, and fear these may lead to a weakened Islamic identity.

Girls' education is generally accepted. Albeit some consider a few years to be enough, most consider girls' right to education to be identical to boys', on certain conditions. Besides security, a female teacher is the most important. However, findings from the village with a long established girl school with female teachers indicate that this is not the crucial factor. In Islamic education, girls will continuously be excluded from advanced Islamic studies since female mullahs do not exist. Apparently, the real obstacles for girls' education are the strictly segregated gender roles in Afghan society. Therefore, a new interpretation of *farz* is emerging, a 'glocalised' version. This is likely to be a decisive factor for giving girls equal access to education in both educational systems.

The study has implications not only for further research but also for planning and policy making in the field of education.

**Descriptors:** Islamic education, Western type of education, girls' education, *farz*, *maktab*, *madrasa*, *adab*, *akhlaq*, Islam, globalisation, gender, folk theory.



TO:

*Abdul Rahman*

*Aisha*

*Abdul Rahim*

*Gul Makei*

*Abdul Qadir*

*Saifullah*

*Zainab*

*Amina*

TO:

*Tanja*

In 2007 UNESCO commemorates  
the 800th Anniversary of the birth of  
Mawlana Jalal-ud-Din Balkhi-Rumi.

*Oh, how often have knowledge and keen wits and  
understandings  
become as deadly as the ghoul or brigand  
to the wayfarer!  
Most of those destined for Paradise  
are simpletons so that they escape from  
the mischief of philosophy.  
Strip yourself of learning and vanity!  
In order that mercy may descend on you at every moment.  
Cleverness is the opposite of abasement and supplication:  
give up cleverness and sort with stupidity.  
Know that cleverness is a trap  
for gaining victory and indulging ambition  
and a scarecrow:  
why should the pure devotee wish to be clever?  
The clever ones are content with an ingenious device;  
the simple ones have gone to rest in the Artificer,  
Because at breakfast time a mother  
will have laid the little child's hands and feet  
on her bosom.*

(Jalal-ul-Din Rumi: Masnavi, Book VI)

Rumi, one of the greatest poets, philosophers and scholars of the  
Islamic civilisation was born in 1207 in Balkh, Afghanistan.

## Acknowledgements

Many people have been helpful in the process of carrying out this study and we are indebted to all of them. Financial support was provided by the Sida's Department for Research Cooperation (SAREC) and without these grants, it had not been possible to complete the present study. We are also grateful for financial contributions from Helge Ax:son Johnsson's Foundation. We have benefited from seminars and lectures at the Institute of International Education as well as other institutions. We want to thank our supervisor Professor Holger Daun for supervising our work. We have often said: 'We are lucky that we have Holger'. To Vivian G Petterson and Jill Taylor we extend many thanks for proofreading the text.

We also like to thank all the parents, children, teachers, mullahs and elders in Sujani and Charbagh who with such generosity shared their ideas and thoughts with us. Without their unreserved and unconditional contributions, their kindness and concerned support this study had never materialised.

These years have entailed strong engagement and fruitful learning. Both of us, but in particular Pia, are culminating our professional careers. We are grateful for having had the opportunity to get deeply involved in studies at this stage of life although it has also at times been trying to submit to the role of a student and the dependence this entails. Now, we have come to an end and look forward to the next project in Afghanistan, in which we will be the teachers!

Finally, we would like to express sincere gratitude to our families. Now we long for spending time with our respective children and, in Pia's case, a wonderful grandson!



## Thank you Afghanistan!

The first time I heard about Afghanistan was when I read Jan Myrdal's book *Kulturers korsväg* (The Crossroad of Cultures) in the 1960s. It was a book full of optimism. More than thirty years later I visited Afghanistan for the first time.

I had been a member of the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan since it started when Afghanistan was invaded by the Soviet Union in 1979. It was as personally evident then as it was when Vietnam was occupied by another superpower for me to join the solidarity movement and defend the country's right to independence. At that time, I believe that most of us had a fairly romantic picture of the resistance movement in Afghanistan. We had only seen pictures of a country at war. Our admiration was great for the impressive *Mujaheddin* fighters, tall, handsome men in magnificent turbans. Our respect for this poor country, which had avoided colonisation and defended the British no less than three times, and now fought a new imperialist power, was enormous.

I came to work with the SCA education programme. Working with the Afghans was an extraordinary experience. I have never, neither before nor after these years, found such satisfaction and happiness in work. There was hard work and discipline, mutual curiosity and learning and a common goal. We travelled a lot in the country and during the long, tiring journeys there was time to talk. About Afghanistan and about Islam. And there were things to see. I thought I would never be able to tell about this immense destruction – and I have not been, words fail. It was easier to tell about the dignified, educated but illiterate families I met. Their generosity. There was always tea and *nan*.

When we stopped the car for a break, it was usually time for praying. The places were always selected carefully. Beautiful spots, green, snow capped mountains in the distance and water trickling or running. The Afghans sometimes joined in a group and sometimes prayed individually. It was serene and peaceful, for me too.

Meeting with the Afghans gave me a sense of meaning and another perspective. The Soviet Union had been defeated. Every one had a sad story to tell. There was pride and there was sadness. But also, there was laughter, every Afghan seemed to have an endless source of jokes and stories. The Afghans nourish the ability to laugh. There was respect, straight backs, direct eye contact and firm handshakes.

Now having seen the wars, my admiration for the *Mujaheddin* remains. My respect for Afghanistan is deep.

Now times are harder again. It is difficult to be hopeful at present. But as before, I believe that the Afghans will overcome thanks to their incredible strength and great faith - and not least with their marvellous sense of humour!

*Pia Karlsson*

## Thank you Sweden!

The first time I came across Sweden was in my geography book in grade five. Sweden was described as a country where there are only nights during six months of the year and only days for six months. Strange indeed!

As *mujahed* in the 1980s, during war breaks, I encouraged villagers in my home province to start schools. We looked for someone with an education and convinced him to become a teacher. We found some textbooks here and there, the children came, only boys at first, and a school was started. Tens of schools began like this. In 1989 I heard about the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan and I went to their head office in Peshawar. They accepted to support “my” schools and everything improved considerably. The children got textbooks and stationery and the teachers got salary. The first girl school started.

“Who are this people in that far away Western country who want to help us?” I, and many others, often wondered. In 1990, I started to work with the SCA education programme and over the years I have met many Swedes. I have realised that there are many good *kafirs* too. I heard that Sweden had never been a (significant) colonising power and that Swedes had also fought the Russians a long time ago. Towards the Swedish people I and other Afghans feel a deep gratitude for the assistance to develop education in Afghanistan. Besides schools for the children, it gave us hope to know that other people in the world supported us.

In 1999, I came to Sweden for the first time. We Afghans are proud over our hospitality and generosity but I must admit I have met the same in Sweden. That Swedish taxpayers have financed my and other foreign students’ PhD studies is indeed a sign of generosity. I am grateful for the time at the International Institute of Education. I am happy to have met so many honest and humble people there. I am thankful for all the things I have learnt. I hope it will be of use for my country.

I have also liked many other things in Sweden. The politeness and gentleness. The good organisation of society. The fairness. The nature. I have experienced the long summer days but now I can tell that my geography book was wrong. Sometimes it has been a bit problematic to wait for the late sunset for my last daily prayer.

I have appreciated my many stays, longer and shorter, not only for the studies but also because they gave me some respite, a breathing space, a rest.

I have come to believe that Swedes and Afghans are fairly similar. But there is one difference. Swedes ask only once. Ultimately, I have learnt that if I want to have some tea when offered I cannot start by saying ‘No, thanks’ and wait for another offer – there won’t be another. I won’t get any tea!

*Amir Mansory*



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# List of Abbreviations

AgBank	Afghan Agriculture Development Bank
ANDS	Afghan National Development Strategy
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CareInt	Care International,
CBE	Community Based Education
CBS	Community Based School
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CSO	Civil Service Organisations
DACAAR	Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees
DFID	UK Department for International Development
EFA	Education For All
EPZ	Export-Processing Zone
EU	European Union
GAD	Gender in Development
GDI	Gender Development Index
GDP	Gross Development Product
GEM	Gender Empowerment Measure
GNI	Gross National Income
GPI	Gender Parity Index
HDI	Human Development Index
HDR	Human Development Report
HPI	Human Poverty Index
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRC	International Rescue Committee
ISAF	International Security Armed Forces
ISESCO	Islamic Organisation for Education, Science and Culture
IT	Information Technology
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
MA	Muslim Aid
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MDGR	Millennium Development Goals Report
MoE	Ministry of Education
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NER	Net Enrolment Ratio

NGO	None-Governmental Organisation
NSP	National Solidarity Program
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SC	Save the Children
SCA	Swedish Committee for Afghanistan
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
TNC	Transnational Corporation
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nation Children Fund
UNO	University of Nebraska at Omaha
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WID	Women in Development

# Afghanistan



Source: Swedish Committee for Afghanistan.



Source: Swedish Committee for Afghanistan.





# Part One

## Frame of the Study



Photo: Pia Karlsson

## An Afghan Dilemma

# Preface

We started our cooperation more than ten years ago. This was when Pia Karlsson started to work with the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, where Amir Mansory had been employed since 1990 in the education unit. Later, we continued to cooperate at Stockholm University and acquired MA degrees before we initiated our PhD studies together. The fact that we cooperate well, in work as well as in studies, we believe is partly due to the fact that we have something common in our backgrounds, which may sound a bit odd to say about a Swedish woman and an Afghan man! Amir was the first (and still the only one) in his family to study. When he was six years old, he enrolled in the first school ever in his village. After three years he continued in a geographically distant boarding institution and eventually graduated from secondary school. He got a stipend and studied engineering in Poland but when he returned home the struggle against the Soviet Union had started and his MSc was of no practical use. Pia has grown up in a working class family in a suburb of Stockholm and was the first ever in her family to get a baccalaureate. In addition, we share a similar political youth: although from very different points of departure the goals of our respective political activities have clear resemblances. We share many basic values.

How is it possible to cooperate in PhD research and write a thesis together? We have been asked this question many times and it is not so easy to answer. We have done most of the course work and related written papers separately but we worked together after the initial research proposal for the fieldwork and in writing up the thesis. In the spring of 2002 we formulated the first proposal with aims and objectives geared toward making an application to Sida's Department for Research Cooperation (SAREC). Already then, we knew we wanted to focus on girls' education and make a comparison of Islamic and Western type of education. Through continuous discussions we finally formulated the aims and objectives that guide the present study. We have continued in the same way: we worked together and cooperated with one another as we elaborated on themes and questions for interviews and observations, as we implemented the case study and conducted the analyses and interpretations, and even in writing up the findings in this dissertation. The latter work was to great extent, however, divided between us (see below). Amir has done some of the preparatory work alone, as well as some additional field visits and Pia has been more active in searching literature and other references. There were periods we have had to cooperate at distance, which, particularly during the last years, has not been problematic thanks to exquisite electronic devices. During these periods of separation we have been able to discuss through Internet (phone, chat or e-mail) nearly everyday.

We have divided the writing more or less equally. The first and the last chapters we have written together, sentence by sentence. Regarding all other chapters, we have first elaborated the gross outlines together, narrowed them down into points to consider in each subchapter, and again further narrowed the items down to paragraph headlines. Thereafter we have decided who should do the writing of the particular chapters with these detailed items as points of departure. The chapters about methodology and all the finding chapters in Part Four of the study are divided between us. We have given or sent to each other items for questioning and comments. The final version of each chapter has been done in cooperation. Together we take the responsibility for the whole thesis.

Chapter	Main responsible
1. Introduction	Pia Karlsson & Amir Mansory
2. Methodology	
From <i>Clarifying our Positions</i> (p. 17 – 27)	Amir Mansory
From <i>In the Field</i> (p. 27 – 41)	Pia Karlsson
3. Education and Knowledge in Islam	Amir Mansory
4. Education and Knowledge in Western Thought	Pia Karlsson
5. Gender in Western Theories and in Islam	Pia Karlsson
6. Globalisation	Amir Mansory
7. The Concept of Folk Model or Folk Theory	Pia Karlsson
8. Afghanistan	Amir Mansory
9. Education in Afghanistan	Amir Mansory
10. Globalisation in Afghanistan	Pia Karlsson
11. Two Afghan Villages	
From <i>Sujani Village</i> (p. 207 – 215)	Pia Karlsson
From <i>Charbagh Village</i> (p. 215 – 224)	Amir Mansory
12. <i>Maktab</i> and <i>Madrasa</i>	
From <i>Islamic Education...</i> (p. 225 – 237)	Pia Karlsson
From <i>Primary School...</i> (p. 238 – 257)	Amir Mansory
13. What is the Meaning?	
From <i>To teach and to learn...</i> (p. 259 – 269)	Pia Karlsson
From <i>To Become Something</i> (p. 270 – 280)	Amir Mansory
14. Girls' Education: Obligation and Separation	
From <i>Introduction</i> (p. 281 – 298)	Pia Karlsson
From <i>Barriers are overcome...</i> (p. 298 – 306)	Amir Mansory
15. Global and Local Pressure for Education	
From <i>Global pressures...</i> (p. 307 – 317)	Pia Karlsson
From <i>Local Pressures...</i> (p. 318 – 319)	Amir Mansory
16. An Afghan Dilemma	
From <i>Four Perspectives</i> (p. 324 – 326)	Amir Mansory
From <i>A folk theory of globalisation</i> (p. 327 – 342)	Pia Karlsson
17. Summary and Conclusion	Pia Karlsson & Amir Mansory

Finally, we definitely agree with Vulliamy (1990) that North-South cooperation is very fruitful – with the amendment, though, that it is very time consuming and at times trying. Sometimes it has taken quite some time to explain to each other what we mean, sometimes it has taken hours to overcome a disagreement, sometimes practical problems with writing on two or more computers have strained our patience and not least, adapting to each other's work schedule (we have both had part time jobs in addition to the PhD studies) has at times proven difficult. In general though, these obstacles have often turned out to be positive. We had to make every effort to clarify what we mean, to sharpen the arguments and to be as systematic and effective as possible. We have not had to compromise in the sense of having to resort to a half-half solution that none of us was fully content with. Instead we continued the discussion until we reached an agreement that satisfied both of us.



# Chapter One

## Introduction

### Problem Area

Education as a means of transmitting values, manners, knowledge and skills from one generation to another has existed in all societies throughout history long before formal educational systems existed and prior to schools and other institutions. Dissemination of cultural meaning systems has, of course, also occurred in Afghanistan throughout the generations. What is today commonly understood as education was actually established in Afghanistan, as in other Muslim countries, many centuries before it took shape in most of the Western world. Education has from the very beginning been an important component of Islam. With the advent of Islam to Afghanistan in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, education also arrived to the country and thus, education within the framework of Islam has existed more than a millennium. It was only approximately one hundred years ago that the type of education that had been developed in the West also reached Afghanistan.

The two educational systems, Islamic education and Western type of education, have existed side by side at times without dissonance but more often than not with conflicts and disagreements. Over the years, three issues have been at stake as regards education in the country: 1) the government's aspiration to control the community run Islamic schools; 2) Islam as a subject area in the curriculum in Western type of schools; and, 3) girls' participation in education. These issues have contributed to a king's exile, to an official ban on girls' education and to the country's occupation by foreign powers. The turbulent events of the past six to seven years have not cooled down the conflict: quite the opposite, the questions are still burning.

Islamic education takes place in mosques, *madrasas*<sup>1</sup> and Quran schools<sup>2</sup>. Mosque schools have existed since the arrival of Islam and the construction of mosques. Today each village and every town block has at least one mosque, often many, and virtually all children, usually the pre-school aged children who live in the neighbourhood, both boys and girls, go to the mosque school and get basic Islamic education. Boys may continue for many years but girls tend to leave when they reach the age of ten or eleven.

*Madrasas* also have a long history. In Afghanistan, *madrasas* have always been intended exclusively for boys and men. The students, the *taliban*<sup>3</sup>, learn a broad

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<sup>1</sup> A *madrasa* is a school for Islamic education.

<sup>2</sup> A Quran school is a school where students learn to memorise the Quran (*dar-ul-hefaz*). (In the literature, *Quranic* school is often used to describe Islamic education in general, which is somewhat misleading since Islamic education includes many additional subjects and not only studies of the Quran).

<sup>3</sup> *Taliban* is the plural form of *talib*, student in *madrasa*.



spectrum of religious subjects as well as Arabic language, logic, rhetoric, literature, history etc. The education has an informal character and students attend on irregular and individual basis. They decide themselves at what pace they wish to learn and for how long they want to continue. Previously, there were small *madrasas* with a handful of *taliban* in thousands of village mosques or in adjacent buildings. A renowned mullah-teacher might attract a large number of students at which point the mosque has to expand and construct special rooms for the training sessions and space for lodging the students. Thus the *madrasa* has become a boarding institution.

Learning in the Quran schools is limited to recitation and memorisation of the Quran. Only boys attend. When the whole Book is learned by heart the boy student becomes a *Qari*, a title regarded as very honourable. In addition to the mentioned institutions, Islamic education also exists at the University level, at the Faculty of Shariah (Islamic Law).

All types of Islamic education (except at the University) have been community based, which means that the village *shura* (council) takes the responsibility for the management - to use a modern word - of the *madrasa* and the mosque school. Encouraged by the *shura*, the village households take turns in providing food to the teachers and students. Usually, the *shura* also organises and collects some kind of remuneration for the teachers; mostly, teachers are paid in kind. The communities are also responsible for maintenance of the mosque and the *madrasa*.

Today, two competing tendencies are visible as regards the community run *madrasa*: On the one hand, the big sprawling institutions with hundreds of *taliban* engaged in intense studies are closing down. Students seem to prefer the Western type of education provided by the government in primary and secondary schools. On the other hand, Islamic education is reviving. Quran Schools seem to be increasingly popular, communities are restarting small *madrasas*, and new forms of Islamic education, sponsored by the government as well as the community, are becoming increasingly accessible. Moreover, Islamic schools for girls have been established in some places based on community as well as at the national level initiatives<sup>4</sup> (Ministry of Education, 2003; Gran, 2006).

Western type of education in Afghanistan was not introduced by a colonial power during the 19<sup>th</sup> century as was the case in most Third World countries (Afghanistan was never, as most of the neighbouring countries, colonised by the British). Nevertheless, Afghanistan incorporated most of the typical features of the Western educational system such as grade structure, school hours and semesters, subjects like language, mathematics, science, etc. which are taught in separate modules, annual examinations, and so on. All such classical qualities were imported to primary and secondary schools, with one difference: Islam was always included as a subject from grade one and onwards. In other Muslim countries, Islamic education often remained a

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<sup>4</sup> The Situation Analyses of The National Education Strategic Plan (2006-2010) reports totally 5,361 female students in "religious schools" in 2006 (Ministry of Education, 2006).

separate system with instruction in the *madrasas*. Schools established by the colonial governments (and before them the missionaries) had a Christian profile or were clearly secular. Only after independence did most, but not all, Muslim countries add Islam to the curriculum in their public educational system (Daun, et al., 2004).

The first public primary school in Afghanistan was established for boys in Kabul in 1903, and the first girl school, also in the capital, opened in 1921 (Samady, 2001). The state has from the beginning been the only provider of Western type of education until the 1980s when the state gradually collapsed and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) took over part of its responsibilities. Provision of education has always been free, from primary to tertiary level, and completely centralised. Fee-based private education was never accepted in Afghanistan, a situation that now seems to be changing, at least in the cities. Institutions of Islamic education may, however, be characterised as private since they have always been the concern of local communities. With the new involvement of the government in Islamic education this state of affairs may also be modified.

The few girl schools that were established in the 1920s closed down after just one decade and were not re-established until the 1950s, mainly, if not exclusively, in the cities. Generally, public education developed very slowly until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century when foreign aid started to assist the expansion of the Western type of education. In the 1970s around one third of all children attended primary schools, of which only 15 per cent were girls (Samady, 2001). In Kabul, however, girls constituted 35 per cent of all pupils while in rural areas hardly any educational opportunities were available to girls (Ghani, cited in Christensen, 1995; Ministry of Planning, 1975). The 1979 Soviet invasion and the eventual collapse of the Afghan state resulted in a failed educational system, in particular in the area of public education. The number of students decreased dramatically throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The foreign occupation of the country gave rise to hard struggles but within a relatively short time many areas were liberated by the resistance movement, the *Mujaheddin*<sup>5</sup>. In these areas the *Mujaheddin* groups, with support of international NGOs, established schools, including schools for girls. This continued during the *Taliban* regime (1996 - 2001). In spite of the *Taliban* ban on girls' education, the number of girl schools in rural areas increased every year. In the cities, however, schools were not allowed to enrol girls.

The primary education curriculum has been in constant flux. It has changed in accordance to the preferences of those in power from the pre-war government to the pro-Communist regime in the 1980s, to the *Mujaheddin* administration, to the *Taliban* rule and up to today's US influenced government.

In 2006, one in five Afghans was child of school age (7 - 12 years). This represents the largest proportion of this age grouping in the world (Government of Afghanistan, 2005). In the same year, Afghanistan had among the world's lowest rates of participation in education. The net enrolment rate was estimated at 53 to 54 per

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<sup>5</sup> *Mujaheddin* is plural of *Mujahed*, holy fighter.

cent. The rate for boys was around 65 per cent while for girls it was between 30 and 40 per cent (Government of Afghanistan, 2004; Ministry of Education, 2005; UNICEF, 2005a)<sup>6</sup>. Girls tend to quit school after only attending for two to three years. There are, however, huge disparities between rural and urban areas. In 2004 in nine provinces with mainly rural populations only 20 per cent of the girls were enrolled in school and in two of the most underserved provinces the figure drops to a mere one per cent of the girls (Government of Afghanistan, 2004; UNICEF 2005a)<sup>7</sup>.

That the two educational systems, Islamic education and Western type of education, have continued to exist in parallel albeit at times in conflict, indicates that they have different aims. The fact that both systems have been supported by the community and by the government, respectively, points to their having different goals as well as different functions. It is evident that the systems also differ organisationally as well as having different structures, curriculum, outputs, etc.

The two educational systems still exist, the conflict is still there and it still circles around the state control over Islamic education and the role of Islam in Western type of education. But are these systems conflicting or can they be complementary? A study by Boyle (2004) in Morocco has shown how Islamic education has got a new face with the *kuttab*s, Islamic pre-schools with female teachers. Boyle has also shown that several of the age-old teaching methods in Islamic schools are similar to methods that today are considered 'modern' or 'progressive' in Western education.

Girls' education still attracts particular interest and the gender issue in general has, in Afghanistan more than elsewhere, become a matter with strong political connotations. Several countries in the region, Muslim as well as non-Muslim, show large gender disparities, for example very low enrolment of girls in education<sup>8</sup> (UNICEF, 2006b). In Afghanistan, however, girls' education has become an extra sensitive issue and attracts the attention of the entire donor community. This is despite that the *Taliban* ban was not the only nor even the main obstacle to girls' participation in education as is clear by the fact that the gender gap in primary enrolment remains constant (Government of Afghanistan, 2005). Therefore, the third issue in the long dispute between Islamic and Western type of education, girls' participation in *both* education systems, remains a controversial matter although with less overt conflict today.

Afghanistan has become wide open for globalisation. Economically, culturally, technologically, politically and educationally the country is being bombarded. The globalising forces are predominantly Western, headed particularly by the United

<sup>6</sup> All figures are estimates and therefore vary in different documents.

<sup>7</sup> All data on population size are extremely uncertain. No census has been taken in the country since the early 1970s and there is not yet any birth registration.

<sup>8</sup> Primary school net enrolment ratio (NER) in 2004 was in Nepal 75 per cent and 66 per cent for boys and girls respectively, in Pakistan 68 and 50 per cent, in Laos 82 and 88 per cent. The gender discrepancy is even wider in some countries in Africa, for example in Chad NER for boys was 75 per cent and for girls 51 per cent (UNICEF, 2006b).

States, and bring such values as individualism, consumerism, commodification and rationalisation of life and social relations. Secular values and values of self-expression and individual choice are spread at the expense of traditional, religious values (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). These features of the global culture are rapidly spreading around the world and have, since the fall of the *Taliban* and the instalment of a new government in 2002, also reached Afghanistan with implications not least for education. Afghanistan's aid dependency, the government budget of 2005 is to 90 per cent financed by foreign aid (Ministry of Planning, 2004), has made the country even more vulnerable to the influences of global culture. The revitalisation of Islamic education, evident in many countries of the world, is one response to globalisation and is also found in Afghanistan.

## Background of the Study

Very little research on education in Afghanistan has been conducted. In the last several years, education has attracted huge interest from donors, UN agencies and NGOs, and a number of reports and articles has been produced by consultants and journalists. However, besides some minor case studies by an American "think tank" and two Master theses (Mansory, 2000 and Karlsson, 2001) no field of education in Afghanistan has been researched scientifically.

Some of the reports are comprehensive and informative (see for example Rugh, 1998; Karlsson, 2005; Spink, 2005; Stilling, 2005; Karlsson 2006) and have, for instance, been used to guide curriculum development and teacher training programmes. The starting point is usually that the excellence of Western type of education as developed and implemented in Europe and North America should be blueprinted into the Afghan educational system. Buzzwords such as 'child centred pedagogy', 'critical thinking', 'quality education', 'life skills education', etc. are incorporated into curricula and teacher training programmes without considering previous experience in Afghanistan or the perceptions ordinary people have about education and the worth they attribute to it. How Afghan parents view the meaning of education and what they expect from sending their children to school has never been studied. Islamic education and Islam in education are issues almost completely overlooked by the existing reports on education. Thus the present study attempts to give views from within two rural communities and communicate the voices of those who are directly involved in education, students, teachers and parents, regardless of which type of educational system they are a part of.

How come these issues – girls' education, Islam and education and globalisation and education - caught our interest and made us write this thesis? Three factors can be mentioned. The first deals with the relationship between girls' education and the

*Taliban* government. In 1996, when we first started to work together in the Swedish supported education programme in Afghanistan, the *Taliban* were soon to seize power in Kabul and conquer the main parts of the country. The Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) had successfully supported girl schools in rural areas since the mid 1980s and became extremely concerned about the *Taliban* ban on girls' education. However, during the five years of *Taliban* rule, the number of girl students in SCA supported schools increased every year. New girl schools were established in many parts of rural Afghanistan and in places where they had never existed before. In 1996, SCA supported schools had 13 per cent girl students and in 2001 this had increased to 30 per cent<sup>9</sup> (Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, 1997 and 2002). This fact was, however, nearly impossible to get through to donors, to media and even to Afghans in exile. Afghanistan was the country where girls were not allowed to go to school and any information that contradicted this 'fact' was of no interest. That SCA (and a few other NGOs) succeeded in establishing girl schools was due to a number of factors, some of which include: a curriculum that included Islam; female teachers for older girls; the good reputation of the organisation; and, long, well established contacts with rural elders and village *shuras*.

We found, already then, that access to education is crucial but far from enough for parents to send their daughters to schools. Today schools have opened all around the country and the number of students has increased by 500,000 to 1 million annually since 2002. However, there is a big difference between boys' and girls' enrolment rates and as recently as in 2006 girls still only constituted 33 per cent of all students and even less in rural areas (Ministry of Education, 2006).

The second issue of shared interest that gradually developed deals with Islam and Islamic education. The Afghan researcher, Amir, is a practising Muslim and had as a young man participated in the *Mujaheddin* movement. For him, Islam was (and is) as self-evident as the air he breathes. The Swedish researcher, Pia, had had fairly little contact with Islam and Islamic education before 1996 but had some familiarity with Afghanistan since she was active in the solidarity movement with Afghanistan during the 1980s. Meeting Afghan Muslims gave her an added dimension for understanding Afghan politics and culture and an awareness of the positive role Islam can play in people's lives. Our eternal discussions about Islam during these ten years and more of cooperation have for Amir engendered a feeling of a return to and revival of his youth experience when Islamic issues were hotly debated by Afghan students. For Pia talking about and debating Islam has entailed a continuous learning exercise, which, among other things, has included an understanding that established dichotomies such as rational versus religious or intellectual versus emotional do not always hold true. This common interest of ours has been further spurred by the developments since 1996. The extreme interpretation of Islam by the *Taliban* deeply hurt most Afghans and was

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<sup>9</sup> In 2001, there were a total of 190,000 students in SCA supported schools (Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, 2002).

regarded with shame. The excessive amount of Islam in education at that time has been replaced by another extreme in the aftermath of the *Taliban* defeat: a neglect of Islamic education and a minimum of Islamic subjects in Western type of schools.

Finally, Afghanistan's situation today presents a conspicuous contrast to the end 1990s when it was isolated and had hardly any inputs from the rest of the world. The *Taliban* period has now been replaced by something completely opposite. The events triggered by the October 2001 invasion, not only by military forces but also through the enormous influx of foreign "experts" and "advisers" to the capital, have made the country and its educational system vulnerable and susceptible to Western influences, culturally, economically and politically. Globalisation has reached Afghanistan.

## Aims and Objectives

The overall aims of this study are twofold: first, we aim at gaining a better understanding of educating children, in particular girls, in the two educational systems in Afghanistan, the Islamic education and the Western type of education; and, second, the aim is to explore some of the effects of globalisation processes on the two educational systems.

In order to contribute to the achievement of the overall aims we have opted for the following specific objectives:

- to present our understanding of parents' motives for choosing different types of schools for their daughters and sons and the meaning parents attribute to education;
- to describe some aspects that may influence girls' participation in education; and,
- to provide an account of how historical roots as well as present globalisation processes may condition today's educational systems.

The research questions focus on areas such as goals and functions of education, different kinds of knowledge, teaching and learning processes, expectations of education, attitudes toward girls' education and effects of globalisation on education. Questions we seek to put light on in our research study are, for example: What goals are prescribed for Islamic education and Western type of education respectively and how are these goals perceived by parents, students, and teachers? Who is responsible for educating children? Why do parents and students choose Western type of education or Islamic education or both? Why are institutions for Islamic education a community affair? What does that imply? What does the concept of *farz* (obligation) in education

mean? What does compulsory education mean? What is the difference? What is the role of the Afghan mosque schools today and in future? Are the two educational systems conflicting or complementary? Are there different kinds of knowledge and learning in the two systems? What is regarded as most important to learn? Is there any difference between teaching methods in the two systems? How do gender roles affect girls' and boys' participation in education? How long do boys and girls continue in schools? What affects their continuation? What is the situation with regards drop out rates and grade repetition? Why do some girls and boys not attend school? Why do girls attend school to a lesser extent (Islamic as well as primary schools) than boys? What are the obstacles and opportunities for girls' participation? What do parents and students expect from education in the two systems? Are expectations different for boys and girls? How come that enrolment has expanded so much in recent years? Are globalisation processes felt at the village level?

Some of the above questions are addressed at length while others are just touched upon. As described in the next chapter the present study is based on a case study with evidence collected during two periods of relatively extensive fieldwork (with additional follow ups).

## Limitations of the Study

The present study deals with several broad themes, each of which represents a topic that in its own right requires and deserves a deeper study than what is provided here. The holistic approach taken here necessarily implies that breadth is favoured at the expense of depth. However, the anticipated interconnections between the themes, Islamic and Western type of education, girls' participation and globalisation, justify, we believe, a broad approach.

The study emphasises the perceptions and expectations of those who are directly concerned with education, students, parents and teachers (from different starting points and with different perspectives). The responses from interviewees are mostly taken at face value, that is, we have not tried to uncover on each and every occasion what might be behind their statements. This approach may appear naïve or romantic for those who prefer the more "sophisticated 'things-are-never-what-they-seem' attitude" (Horton, 1993, p. 220) but has yielded, at least in our view, interesting results. One example is that we have allowed men, fathers of girls, to give voice to their concerns about girls' education without labelling them as 'conservatives' or 'macho', which is common in reports on girls' education in Afghanistan.

It has not been possible to link or compare this study to a body of previous research on similar topics in Afghanistan for the simple reason that no such studies have been found. Research in whatever discipline in Afghanistan is exceptional and has been



extremely rare in the past decades. Western type of education and girls' participation in public education has attracted much attention and interest and quite a few consultancy reports have been produced. Islamic education has been largely neglected or disregarded as a topic for study, by all groups including Muslims and not only in Afghanistan.

We have to some extent drawn on experience of research in other developing countries, which however, usually suffers from the disadvantage of being conducted by Western researchers with the limitations that that implies. We have not been able to find and learn from experiences of the type of research duo that we represent.

The study is limited in its scope to certain levels of education. With regards to Western type of education we have only studied primary schools (and a few so called accelerated learning classes). Concerning Islamic education the study has focussed mainly on mosque schools, although Quran schools and *madrasas* to a limited extent have also been included. The samples exclude families with no school age children and only families with both sons and daughters aged 6 – 14 years are included. Neither learning achievements nor learning *per se*, were studied although questions dealing with, for example, learning techniques and expectations of education were posed. Specific teaching methods have not been studied but general teaching approaches have been observed and are discussed.

Only two villages are included in the study and both are situated in fairly remote rural areas. Although it might have been interesting to contrast an urban to a rural setting we opted for these rural locations since the majority of the Afghan population lives in rural areas.

Another limitation of the study is the relatively short time (five and six weeks, respectively) we spent in the villages. Due to the unstable security conditions we were not able to stay overnight in any of the villages but had to travel back and forth every day. The long-term participatory approach we had initially intended had to be abandoned. However, our substantial previous experience, particularly Amir's, has allowed for recognising and understanding matters in a way that might not have been possible had we been novices.

Although we did not have to employ an uninitiated translator (except for the interviews with mothers), responses are still translated with all what that implies in value losses, misunderstandings and misconceptions. Translations and transcriptions have been made into English, a language that none of us have complete command of since it is not our mother tongue.

From our point of view, the most serious limitation related to our interviews is the fact that comparatively few mothers<sup>10</sup> were interviewed. This was due to the difficulty in finding female translators and due to the inexperience of the ones we found. Thus some of the results of the interviews with mothers are not as rich as those conducted with fathers and other respondents.

Interviewing children presents a particular problem. In general, it may be

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<sup>10</sup> 14 mothers and 33 fathers were interviewed.



difficult for adults to understand and interpret children's subjective realities. Children may also have greater difficulties than adults in expressing their ideas. To be asked for a view or opinion seemed to be a new experience for some of the children we interviewed. They searched for the 'correct' answer as if we were teachers questioning about homework. Another limitation in relation to the interviews with children is that their home environment or their academic achievements are only occasionally being considered.

Sporadically we relate responses to the interviewees' socioeconomic background. Data on educational experience and present occupation of the adult respondents were collected. However, due to time limitations and the lack of any published socio-economic data as well as the fact that socio-economic diversities are relatively limited in the selected villages, the financial status of the respondents is only self ranked (as poor, middle or rich).

The findings are limited to the persons interviewed and it would be difficult to generalise the results reported here to other villages in Afghanistan. Although the conclusions cannot be considered representative for larger groups of students, parents, teachers or villagers in general, the results might be "extrapolated" (Patton, 1987) to similar settings and situations in present day Afghanistan. Additional limitations have to do with issues of reliability and validity, which are further discussed in *Chapter Two Methodology*.

Some of the findings of this study may soon be out of date due to the effects of globalisation and the rapidity of change. However, since many of the issues discussed in this study refer to especially sensitive human feelings and attitudes and deal with long-established traditions, the conclusions may have significance for quite some time. It is expected that the findings as well as the approach and methods applied in this study will contribute to the knowledge about education of Afghan children. Hopefully this study will make planners, decision-makers, donors and practitioners more aware of the role and goal of education as perceived by those who are most concerned.

## Organisation of the Study

This study is divided into five parts. Part One provides the general frame of the study. It consists of two chapters, the present one and Chapter Two in which the methods applied in the study are presented and discussed. Here we also discuss the implications of being two researchers writing a PhD thesis together.

In Part Two themes and concepts of relevance for the present study are discussed. The concepts of education and knowledge in Islam and in Western thought are presented in Chapter Three and Four, respectively. Chapter Five discusses Gender in Western theories and in Islam. Chapter Six provides a brief overview of globalisation, in general

and in particular with regards to globalisation and Islam, gender and education. Chapter Seven elaborates on folk models or folk theories, the term we prefer to use.

Part Three sets the scene for understanding what follows in the next part. Chapter Eight describes the country of Afghanistan and sketches its geographical conditions, tells about its people and languages, and provides a short account of its historical development, culture and religion. Chapter Nine elaborates on education in the country. The last chapter in the Part III, Chapter Ten, illustrates some aspects of how globalisation processes have affected the country, particularly in education after 2001.

Part Four consists of five chapters covering the case study with a presentation of the findings, observations, interview responses and the analyses and interpretations of these. Chapter Eleven introduces and compares the two villages studied and Chapter Twelve presents our observations of the educational institutions there. A discussion of students' absenteeism, drop out and repetition rates is also provided. In Chapter Thirteen parents and other interviewees respond to questions associated with meaning of education and in Chapter Fourteen the respondents' views on girls' participation in education is reported and discussed. The last chapter in Part IV, Chapter Fifteen, describes changes that have occurred, real or perceived, according to the respondents. The focus is on changes experienced by the villagers with regards to education but sometimes examples from other fields are also included.

Part Five is the conclusion. Chapter Sixteen presents two Afghan folk theories, one on the concept of *farz* in education and the second is a folk theory of globalisation. Both imply difficult-to-solve dilemmas, the characteristics of which we have outlined in this chapter. Finally, Chapter Seventeen includes a summary and conclusion of the thesis and its relationship to the objectives of the study.



# Chapter Two

## Methodology

### Clarifying our positions

There are many definitions of research, and terms such as ‘investigation’, ‘inquiry’ and ‘study’ are used interchangeably. Very simply put, research is about understanding how things are, explaining why things are as they are and perhaps predicting what will or can happen. Research is a tool for advancing or generating new knowledge. Something that appealed to us already at an early stage, when we embarked upon this enterprise, was a distinction made by Bell (1999). She emphasises the *systematic* approach in research as important and distinctive from other types of knowledge acquisition. Our endeavour has been to be systematic, from selection of topic, planning of field studies, collection of data, categorisation and classification of findings, analysing, interpretation and finally, to writing the thesis.

The notion that science is objective, and scientific knowledge is reliable because it is proven knowledge, arrived at through rigorous observations and experiments, has gradually given way to an understanding that it is inevitable that personal preferences, political and value considerations, as well as previous experiences affect the researcher and his/her findings. Objectivity as something above criticism does not exist. Such is the case particularly in social science research. Certainly, this study does not take the stance of positivists or behaviourists. Human beings are not simply formed, indeed mirrored, by the environment. Their actions cannot be explained by causes and effects. They are not predictable, easy for the social scientist to study “in the same state of mind as the physicist, chemist or physiologist when he probes into a still unexplored region of the scientific domain” (Durkheim, 1964, p. xiv, cited in May, 1997). There is a fundamental difference between the study of natural objects and human beings. Objectivity in the positivist sense is not applicable in this study (or in social science research generally) since we have sought to find people’s beliefs, notions and ideas, the *meaning* they attach to, in particular, phenomena related to education. Hence, our focus is on *subjectivity*.

Subjectivity has been defined as an “‘inner’ world of experiences, rather than the world ‘out there’” (May, 1997, p. 13). As researchers, we cannot know people’s ‘inner world’. We can only know their interpretations of it: “the only thing we can know with certainty is how people interpret the world around them” (ibid. p. 13). Contrary to May, though, we do *not* claim to know people’s interpretations “with certainty”. Rather, we are only able to interpret their interpretations, as in the case of the folk theories in *Chapter 16 An Afghan Dilemma*.

Researchers sometimes write in a manner as to suggest “an aura of objectivity” (Bryman, 2004, p. 23). An example is the researcher who refers to himself as ‘the author of the study’. Recognising that subjectivity plays an important role in this study, we use ‘we’ when referring to ourselves and sometimes we even put our personal names ‘Amir’ and ‘Pia’. The alternative, ‘the Swedish researcher’ or ‘the Afghan researcher’ appears to us both inept and pretentious.

According to May (1997), three issues should be clarified by a researcher in social science: a) his/her view on knowledge, how knowledge about the social world is gained; b) the relationships between theory and research; and, c) the place of values and ethics in research practice. We elucidate our stances on these issues in the following pages.

Ontological positions give rise to epistemological positions, which in turn yield the methodological concerns. These in turn, determine the type of data collection techniques to employ (Cohen, et al., 2004). Ontology is the “beliefs about the nature of the social world and what can be known about it” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p 62). It refers to how we look upon social life: either as something static, given, objective, “out there”, external to social actors; or, as a social construction, as something that people influence, create, construct in interaction, “as something people are in the process of fashioning” (Bryman, 2004, p. 3). The first standpoint claims that universal laws govern society and human conduct. The second argues that social phenomena and their meanings are continuously being accomplished by people through social interaction: social objects and categories are socially constructed. In this study we support the latter. We regard reality as a social construction (Berger & Luckman, 1967) and as constantly changing. Human beings are fundamental in social life and they are never static: they are active. They act and react to the social environment.

Epistemologically, this study does not take the positivist position, which views knowledge as “hard, objective and tangible” (Cohen et al., 2004, p. 6). Instead, knowledge is “personal, subjective and unique” (ibid.). Therefore, we do not find a positivist approach, which involves the generation of hypotheses and theory testing, appropriate for this study. Instead, we have opted for an interpretive approach, which fits better, not only with our general basic assumptions but also with the nature of the present study, which aims to understand how people make sense of the world, and what motivates their actions. Human beings act according to what they find meaningful. In other words, they attribute meanings to their own as well as to others’ actions; the social reality has for them a meaning. As researchers, we have sought to understand people’s ‘common-sense-thinking’ and tried to make an interpretation from their point of view. The interpretive paradigm requires researchers to interact with the subjects of their research (Vulliamy, 1990).

Research methods are not neutral tools and research data are collected in relation to something, usually a theory (Bryman, 2004). The difference between quantitative and qualitative research is the most fundamental distinction in social science research,

a difference closely related to whether theory guides research or whether theory is an outcome of research (*ibid.*). The present study does not present a theoretical framework as a point of departure but presents relevant themes or conceptualisations (see *Chapter 3 Conceptualisations*). It applies an inductive approach and presents theoretical explanations based on findings, which have been found relevant. Inductive research design begins with observations and builds up patterns, through categorisations and classifications, which emerge from analysing observations (Patton, 1987; May, 1997). Actually, we have applied an inductive *iterative* approach since we observed and collected data by going back and forth to the field, revising our questions and the emerging concepts. Many of the most interesting issues for analyses came forward during the field studies. New insights were gained and new key persons were interviewed. We have thus borrowed some elements from the grounded theory approach. Charmaz (2000) explains that the grounded theory method includes “simultaneous collection and analysis of data...” (p. 509) and notes that “it is flexible because researchers can modify their emerging or established analyses as conditions change or further data are gathered” (p. 511).

## Values and biases

There are numerous points at which personal biases and intrusion of values can occur, from the initial choice of topics and methods to data collection and interpretation (Bryman, 2004). Affection and sympathy may arise or may have been there from the start. Even close affinity may develop along the way. The opposite may also happen: disgust may cause the researcher to repel from the people who participate in the study. In both cases, it may be difficult to disentangle these emotions from the interviewees (*ibid.*).

We recognise and acknowledge that we have a keen interest in the people we have met (most of them!) in the villages. One of our aims is to make their voices heard. Education policies in Afghanistan have, in our view, only marginally taken Afghan people’s views into account. We hope that our findings will have at least some influence on future actions taken by the Ministry of Education and others. However, aware of the risk of being too empathetic, we have strived at being particularly self-critical and self-reflective. Such reflexivity has been facilitated by the fact that we have been two researchers. We have constantly questioned each other’s notions, statements, and conclusions (see also sections below). Bourdieu (1993) clearly states that besides the need to be well armed scientifically, a researcher must be critical and interested. Indeed, the link between interest and the production of scientific ‘truths’ is essential: A researcher who “manages to produce any truth ... does so not despite the interest he has in producing that truth but *because* he has an interest in doing so – which is the exact opposite of the usual somewhat fatuous discourse on ‘neutrality’ [*italics in original*] (p.

11). Ethical considerations in research include not only the researcher's personal values but also professional moral. This is discussed in a separate paragraph below.

## Research in developing countries

Biases and value laden studies may be more common when research is conducted in developing countries. Early anthropological studies displayed colonial and other types of superior attitudes. Notorious is, for example, the description of Third World people as 'savages' or 'primitives' (Wolcott, 1999). The main drawback for a Western researcher (or other foreigner) is obviously the language. Having to rely on translators implies a serious difficulty regardless of the language proficiency and culture familiarity of the interpreters. Native translators may be as foreign as a Western researcher in certain settings. Lack of language skills often goes hand in hand with scarce knowledge and understanding of social conditions, culture, history and the political situation. In addition, Western values about family, child rearing, gender issues, and quality of life, or Western notions of individual rights, rational thinking, and secularism may constitute tinted glasses for Western trained researchers – or may even make them blind. Western researchers have often internalised such conceptions to the degree that they are not even aware they hold them. These notions are part and parcel of the personality, taken for granted, and in the worst cases, considered self-evident and universal. Western researchers may also have their own career as the prime goal of the research and thus may exploit the humans they study (Vulliamy, 1990).

We believe that we have been able to escape many of the traps and pitfalls commonly experienced by foreign researchers in developing countries. We did not have to engage translators (except for the interviews with mothers), and more importantly, one of us is a native Afghan who is familiar with and still has roots in rural Afghanistan. Travestyng feminists who claim that only research on women intended for women will be consistent with women's needs (Bryman, 2004) we contend that neutrality and value-free research can seldom be expected when research in Third World countries is conducted by Western researchers. Mies (1968) has argued for "*conscious partiality*, which is achieved through partial identification with the research objects" (cited in Bryman, 2004, p. 22) to replace the postulate of value free research.

## Two researchers

### Insider and Outsider

The fact that one of us is Afghan has implied a ‘partial identification’, an identification that has, as we see it, been an asset for this study. Amir’s background in rural Afghanistan, in a remote village where the majority of his relatives still live, has aided the identification. This identification did not burden his role as researcher, partly due to the fact that Pia, the Western researcher, by unrelenting probes frequently caused or forced him to detach from this identity. On the other hand, the ballast of Western education and upbringing Pia holds was insistently scrutinised by Amir. Indeed, the mutual sensitivity to and continuous reflections on our respective cultural, political, social and religious contexts have benefited this study. For neither of us would this study have been possible without the other.

In our view, it is naïve to believe that outside researchers, however well armed scientifically, are able to generate new knowledge *because* they are outsiders and equipped with ‘fresh eyes’ and ‘open minds’ when they plunge into an unknown environment and unfamiliar culture. However, that an outsider may discover things an insider is blind to has some truth. Being an outsider provides an ability to stand back and disengage. For the insider, familiarity may have disadvantages. Patterns may be hard to discern and meanings attached to events and actions difficult to interpret for someone who is thoroughly acculturated in a familiar situation (Burgess, 1995). On the other hand, an insider may gain more confidence from the respondents and thus get more information than a foreigner who may be regarded with suspicion and even fear. Moreover, not only the expatriate may be an outsider as researcher in Third World countries. Well educated (Western educated) nationals may have detached so much from their origins that they have lost their ‘insideness’ (Stephens, 1990). An insider may overlook situations and take things for granted while an outsider may ‘overinterpret’ events and statements. The issue at stake is to make the familiar strange and the strange familiar (Spindler & Spindler, 1982).

Chambers (1991) has described the characteristics of outsiders as a class of well-offs, literate, urban-based, healthy, well nourished and able to choose and the insiders as poor, illiterate, sick, ill nourished and trapped. Research runs the risk of being confused with “rural development tourism” (p. 10). He lists six biases that impede researchers’ understanding of poor rural life. The first is the “spatial bias: urban, tarmac and roadside” (p. 13), which occurs since outsiders are based in cities, travel in vehicles and visit only villages which are located along the main road and thereby miss isolated villages with the poorest people. Second, the project bias implies that outsiders tend to visit locations where there are interesting projects and these represent only “tiny atypical islands” (p. 16). Third, person biases imply that the main source of



information the outsider has available is statements from the rural ‘elite’, male village and religious leaders, teachers, traders, etc. or from the ‘users’ (for example, children in school are interviewed but not those out of school), which leave out information from those most deprived. Fourth is the dry season bias, which implies that outsiders do not know anything about the worst periods of the year when life is at its most difficult for people, which might be during the dry or the wet season. Diplomatic biases, such as politeness and timidity, cause the outsider to refrain from posing awkward questions or from visiting the poorest houses. Finally, professional biases make it difficult for outsiders who are very specialized to see the linkages of deprivation, the web in which poverty, isolation, physical weakness, powerlessness, and so forth intertwine.

In Chambers’ sense, we were both outsiders. We had studied his book before we entered the field and did what we could to avoid, or at least to smooth out, the biases. We did travel by car every day to the villages but the sites are not located along a main tarmac road. Indeed, to reach the villages the bumpy trip took place at the speed of 20 - 30 km per hour due to the poor road conditions. The first village had no experience whatsoever of development or research projects, while the second village had received foreign support: a Swedish NGO had supported the school for a long time<sup>11</sup>. In both villages, the bulk of information we collected was from poor, illiterate people. We interviewed minorities, people from the outskirts of the villages, as well as children out of school. Our fieldwork was conducted in April and December, not in the winter, the worst period of the year. The northern village would not have been possible to reach in wintertime. We were relatively free from diplomatic and professional biases, partly because we were two researchers. Pia as a foreigner could ask ‘silly’ questions and there was seldom a problem for Amir to put forward intimate questions since the respondent knew that Pia did not understand.

Still, we were of course outsiders, and were seen as a very strange couple. Even Amir, in spite of his traditional dress, his beard, his language skills, and his religious practices, was alien. He was unknown to the villagers, he originated from another, far away province and he was an educated man. In addition, he was working with a woman, a foreign woman, an *Angrez*<sup>12</sup>! Pia was a rare specimen with her different looks and limited language ability. One cannot help being inside one’s skin but due to previous knowledge and experience, and thanks to Amir and his willingness to share his knowledge, Pia might at least be called an “informed outsider”. As insider, Amir was not only able to *see* but also to *feel*; repeatedly he recalled and sensed his own childhood, his school time with teachers and schoolmates. Times had not changed much. The willingness with which the villagers, parents, children, teachers, elders, and mullahs shared their ideas and experiences, and the esteem, even sympathy that gradually grew toward us (as opposed to the initially reluctant attitudes), were, we

<sup>11</sup> The schools had had contact with Afghan staff from the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan for more than ten years. Very seldom had a foreigner visited the village.

<sup>12</sup> *Angrez* means British but is, at least in rural areas, used for all foreigners.

believe, mainly the result of Amir's familiarity, knowledge and understanding of their conditions. It was also to some extent due to the way we behaved and acted. Our endeavour was to conduct ourselves in a way that at least did not add to our strangeness.

## Male and female

Gender is another issue of concern as to the researcher's role in the field. Amir as a male researcher observed different things and events than did Pia, the female researcher. For example, how girls were seated in the mosque school compared to boys or how a male teacher addressed girls and boys differently. Generally, a male and a female researcher would probably get different answers from male and female respondents since the expectations of men and women are different. In Afghanistan, the segregation between the sexes is pronounced and implies (among other things) that men and women have access to different kinds of information. As a male researcher, Amir had no access to women's spheres but Pia, accompanied by Amir, could easily enter into to the men's world. Had the situation been the opposite, that is, had this study had been carried out by a female Afghan researcher and a male Swedish researcher, the barriers to male respondents would have been extremely hard to overcome and access to female responses would have been just as impossible for them as a couple.

## A qualitative approach

As mentioned, we were not interested in testing hypotheses and theories elaborated in advance but rather wanted to explain and interpret a piece of social reality after carrying out the study. We wanted to use inductive methods so as to conceptualise the phenomena we encountered and theorise on the relationships. Our aim was to understand what kind of motives govern people's choices, what meaning they attribute to education for girls and boys, how they think about their present life situation and how they perceive the future. Hence, to opt for qualitative methods was an easy choice.

The present study is a case study, involving two villages. Although case studies are not limited to qualitative research (Bryman, 2004) they are often associated with the main qualitative methods, interviews and observations. Document analyses, a third method, are often included too. Case studies are valuable since they enable the researcher to capture the meanings people attribute to social phenomena and individual differences as regards their experiences and perceptions (Patton, 1987). There are several types of cases, such as unique or extreme cases, critical cases, revelatory cases

and exemplifying cases (Bryman, 2004). The villages we studied are not extreme or unusual, but have provided “a suitable context for certain research questions to be answered” and has allowed for an examination of “key social processes” (ibid., p. 51). Questions of external validity and ability to generalize are much debated issues when dealing with case studies. Generally, evidence from case studies is limited and represents restricted external validity. Findings from case studies cannot be generalised and this is not the purpose of case study research (ibid.). The aim is to “generate an intensive examination of a single case, in relation to which they [the researchers] then engage in a theoretical analysis” (ibid., p. 52).

Interviewing in qualitative research consists of in-depth, open-ended interviews as opposed to structured interviews used in quantitative research. According to Patton (1987), there are three types of interviews for collection of qualitative data: “(1) the informal conversational interview, (2) the general interview guide approach, and (3) the standardized open-ended interview” (p. 109). Bryman (2004) identifies qualitative interviews as in-depth interviews and distinguishes between unstructured and semi-structured interviews. The current study has mainly used an interview guide covering a number of themes. However, on many occasions unstructured data was collected through informal conversations (see section below).

In addition to interviews, observations were used for collecting information. According to Patton (1987), observation as a research method has many advantages. Observations in qualitative research enable the researcher to understand the context and get a holistic perspective. They may contribute to the information that interviewees may not like to talk about. Observations may include not only the informants’ perceptions but also the observer’s and in addition, the researcher’s, own impressions and feelings. Finally, observations make it possible to see things that otherwise may easily escape those who live in that setting. The observer’s involvement varies on a continuum from complete immersion as participant to complete separation as onlooker (ibid.). The present study, has take a position somewhere in the middle of this scale. Amir’s position has been towards the one of the participant and Pia’s towards the onlooker. Bryman (2004) states that definitions of participant observation and ethnography are difficult to distinguish since both include the engagement of an observer in a social setting for an extended period of time with observations, conversations, interviews and document analysis aiming at understanding the behaviour of the people who live in the particular context. Given this definition, the present study has certainly ethnographic elements.

The present study relies mainly on interviews with parents, students, teachers, mullahs and other villagers in two Afghan villages. In addition, observations, primarily in the classrooms of the various types of schools, had a semi-structured form. In addition, more casual observations of the village environment, indoors as well as outdoors, were made. During the interviews, Pia often took the role of an observer. When Amir was engaged in questioning and conversing, Pia had the opportunity

to look for facial expressions, body movements, gestures, in other words, the body language, which sometimes was more informative than the answers or statements. The interviews were of an in-depth and semi-structured character, leaving a lot of room for sidetracks and follow up questions. We also interviewed reputed Islamic scholars in Kabul, including a judge of the Supreme Court, staff at the Ministry of Education and teachers at the Faculty of *Shariat*, University of Kabul.

The main field studies took place in April-May 2004 and November- December 2004. In April 2006, Amir returned to both villages for additional data collection. Complementary interviews were conducted by both of us in April 2005 and January 2006. (For a more comprehensive description, see below).

## Questions and themes

Guided by the research questions, themes were elaborated as an interview guide consisting of six issues, most of which were related to both Western type of education and Islamic education. The first issue is about perceptions of knowledge, including different kinds of knowledge of the two systems, acquisition of knowledge, necessary knowledge, and so forth. The second theme deals with goals of education, and the questions refer to, for example, expected outcomes of the respective systems and advantages and disadvantages of education. Third, teaching and learning methods are the focus and topic such as requirements on teachers, memorisation as a learning technique, and the use of a stick are aired. Fourth, girls' and boys' participation in one or both educational systems is discussed. The fifth theme is related to gender issues and questions about length of education, expectations, achievement, and changes in relation to girls' participation in education are included. The last theme includes miscellaneous issues, for example discussions about upbringing of children, decision-making in the family, labour division, refugee experience, and religious practices. The respondents in the villages were asked questions from practically all the themes but the way issues were brought up and questions phrased varied with the interviewees. When talking with a girl in grade 3, our approach was of course different from an interview with the village imam.

The themes and questions emerged from the aims and objectives and the research questions. However, our previous, relatively extensive experience of Afghan education also influenced the selection of topics, which might have been an advantage or disadvantage. Still, it was probably more of the former than of the latter.

Our aim has not been to pose tricky questions in order to unmask or make people reveal themselves. We have mostly taken at face value what the respondents said. Nonetheless, on several occasions, we had reason to question the genuineness of the responses and statements made. Many questions relate to moral and religious issues and it was obvious that what people said what was not always what they actually did

or thought. They responded normatively, to an ideal of how things ought to be, or how people should behave and act. We formulated a number of questions of similar kinds and avoided putting such questions in sequence. This way we were able to disclose several contradictions, particularly as regards gender sensitive issues.

The observation scheme focussed on teaching methods and interactions in the classroom or mosque room. Types of activities were recorded, such as teachers' questions, confirmations and use of corrections, and students' level and type of activities. Our presence in the classrooms probably had some effect on what was happening, less so though, when the 'classroom' was located outdoors and we were less eye-catching.

## Ethical principles

Discussions about ethical principles in qualitative (and quantitative) social research revolve around such issues as: whether participants may be harmed; if they are properly informed and have consented to participate; how access and acceptance have been gained; how anonymity and confidentiality are defined and maintained; and, how the results will be used (Bell, 1999; Bryman, 2004; Cohen, et al., 2004). To implement these principles may be easier said than done. For example, to get 'informed consent', that participants should agree to participate after they have been informed of facts that would influence their decision on whether to participate or not, may be complicated. To explain the scope of the research, the aims and objectives, or the end result for people with no experience whatsoever of similar activities is not easy. In particular it can be difficult when children are involved.

Gaining access is often a political process and involves negotiations with official authorities or organisations (Bryman, 2004). Achieving good will and cooperation by other significant figures is also important (Cohen, et al., 2004). To maintain the confidentiality of records and the information provided by interviewees, and to ensure that individuals are not identified or identifiable are essential ethical principles in social research.

For this study permission was obtained from the respective provincial Departments of Education. These permits were presented to district education authorities, the school headmasters and the village *shuras* (councils). In addition, personal letters of introduction and private contacts were used to gain access to the communities (see *Chapter 11 Two Afghan Villages*). We made great efforts to explain the purpose of the study to the villagers and we tried to be as honest as possible when we introduced ourselves and our work.

The anonymity of the respondents is guaranteed by not disclosing their names (children have been given other names) and by only using identities such as 'father', 'mother' and 'teacher'. The province location of the villages is not revealed but we have kept the real names of the villages, Sujani and Charbagh, for two reasons. First,

these village names are common and there are many villages with the same name in Afghanistan. It therefore would be difficult to identify which ones are described in this study. Second, the villagers expressed pride in getting a 'book' written about themselves and their schools and told us that they did not mind if the proper names are used. One might object and claim that people did not know or understand the importance of confidentiality. This is true, but on the other hand, there is hardly any information that would harm the villages or their inhabitants in the present study.

Another issue related to ethical principles is what to call those who have provided the information. Words like 'natives' and 'objects' are terms now abandoned but 'subjects' still appear in the literature. Now 'participants' or even 'collaborators' are preferred (Wolcott, 1999). 'Informants' and 'respondents' are sometimes distinguished by the former providing facts and/or information or opinions representative of a larger group while the latter provide personal opinions, intentions, attitudes, choices, and other issues of interest for the researcher (Zelditch, 1970, cited in Daun, 1992). We feel somewhat uncomfortable with all of these terms as well as with the ones we use but we have not found any better options. We decided to use 'interviewee', 'respondent', 'informant', 'participant' and 'people of the study' all of which are employed interchangeably.

## In the field

### Two villages

There were many issues to consider in selecting locations for the field studies. We had planned for two cases, to study education in two villages, for several reasons. First of all, we wanted the ability to contrast and compare. In *Chapter 8 Afghanistan*, the various ethnic groups, their geographical locations and different languages are described. Pashtuns, the biggest ethnic group, live mainly in the south while Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks live in the northern and central parts of the country. Pashto and Dari are the two main languages. Initially, we planned for one village in the north with a Dari-speaking population and another one in the south with Pashto-speakers. Another reason for studying two villages was simply because we are two researchers who were writing a thesis together and we would not have been satisfied with just one field study.

The villages we selected provide many interesting differences that allow for comparisons. However, as the collection of data proceeded, particularly in the second village, and as the analyses and interpretations of the findings advanced, it became increasingly clear that the villages and the collected data *complemented* each other

rather than *contrasted* with each other. Therefore, we generally, but not always, deal with the data as if emanating from one single case. By doing so we believe that the study provides a more comprehensive picture and contributes to a more enriched understanding of education in rural Afghanistan.

Since the intention is to study education in primary schools and religious schools, and since girls' education is the focus, the villages selected had to have primary schools for boys and girls as well as an Islamic school, a *madrassa*. We did not have to bother about another criterion such as the existence of a mosque school since religious education in the mosque is prevalent in each and every village in Afghanistan. By the end of 2003, Amir was in touch with colleagues, friends and authorities in order to identify villages that matched the criteria for our study. In January 2004, he travelled to the northern provinces. To find a village with a Western type of boy school was pretty easy in spring 2004. Nor were there any major problems with being able to identify a parallel girl school in the same building or location as the boy school. Due to the intensive advocacy campaigns and great investment in girls' education that had taken place since 2002, girls had become school students as never before. What turned out to be a unexpectedly difficult was to find a village with a functioning *madrassa*. *Madrasas* are and were community affairs but wherever villagers were asked, they denied the existence of a *madrassa* in their community. Either it had closed down or it had never existed. This was a very astonishing result and its credibility must be questioned. Either people wanted to conceal the existence of a *madrassa* in their village for fear of attracting attention to it since studying in a *madrassa* in the spring of 2004 could be dangerous and regarded as a terrorist activity. Or, they had actually closed down the school for the same reason or for lack of students or teachers. After much travelling and many discussions, a village in the north that matched the conditions we had set up was finally found.

But not only should our village provide education of both types and for both girls and boys, it also had to be a safe place. Two years had passed since the *Taliban* were driven out but others had returned. Old warlords who had been disarmed or who had fled the ravaging of the *Taliban* had come back. They were well equipped and were now harassing the population and/or were fighting each other in many areas of the country especially in the north. Neither were all areas safe from American bombings. We had to identify an area that was reasonably safe and where the situation had been stable for some time. While the situation was tense everywhere, there were places where peace had lasted for quite a long period. In addition, accessibility was yet another factor to take into account. It had to be possible to reach or get close to the village by car.

To identify a village in southern Afghanistan was even more difficult. By autumn 2004, the security situation in the southern parts of the country had deteriorated to such an extent that many of the provinces we had had in mind were now out of the question. Instead we selected a village in the south-eastern part of Afghanistan, which



corresponded to the criteria we had set up. (For more information about the villages, see *Chapter 11 Two Afghan Villages*).

## A pre-study

Piloting is always necessary before a main study starts so in spite of our comparatively extensive experience of Afghan education and rural life, we decided to pilot our questions and themes. In August 2003 we visited two villages located in two provinces around Kabul. We met with teachers and headmasters, mullahs, fathers and students, girls and boys, sometimes in groups and sometimes individually. Based on our research questions, we had elaborated thematic areas and developed an interview guide.

The people interviewed articulated different, sometimes opposite views. In one village, located along the main road from Kabul to Peshawar, people looked positively on the new things that were happening, mentioning examples such as parabolic antennas and foreign TV programmes, the arrival of foreigners, numerous cars and new things to buy in the bazaar. In this village more than one thousand girls attended the primary school. In the other village, located in a more isolated rural setting, but at a similar distance from Kabul, people were anxious about these signs and regarded the novelties with suspicion. In this village, a majority rejected sending their daughters to school.

Already at this stage we felt the conflicts or dilemmas that would appear so clearly later on in our interviews with people in the selected villages. “Educated men have better life, they have office work with salary, their children do not have to work hard and they do not use hashish” was, on the one hand, the perceived benefits of education as one father in the first village articulated it. On the other hand, the present state of affairs “is negative [because] the younger generation is less committed to Islam, they are more interested in music and video shows” was how the harmful effects of present development were understood, and typical for the second village.

Opposing views were also expressed regarding girls’ education. In the first village there was a big primary school for girls with students up to grade six. In the other village only a handful of parents sent their daughters to a girl school located in a neighbouring village. Parents of the first village said that they wanted their daughters to study up to grade 12, while parents in the second village disliked even the look of schoolgirls and found their dress and behaviour (especially in Kabul) loathsome. In the first village, the *madrasa* had been introduced by the *Taliban* regime and had now closed down. In the second village, the *madrasa* had been in full swing until 2002 but had then turned into a Quran school with some 20 students.

The closure of *madrasas*, the prohibition for men and boys in public schools and offices to wear traditional clothes and the push for girls’ education represented what was perceived as ‘forced Westernisation’. After this pre-study, we realised the need to include a discussion about the effects of globalisation in Afghanistan, and particularly,



the role of globalisation processes in the educational systems of the country. We also modified the interview guide since we realised that it was better to have fewer broader questions – themes – instead of many detailed issues and to concentrate more on understanding the meaning people attribute to various issues.

## The initial surveys

Before we arrived in the field, we hired assistants who collected background information about the village population based upon two questionnaires (see Annexes 1 and 2). First, all houses in the village were visited and data on the household composition was collected for all types of families. When the assistant encountered a family with children in the age span 6 - 14 years, he proceeded with the second questionnaire and collected data on the total number of children in the family, their sex and age as well as which school(s) the children attended. Moreover, information was gathered about the parents' educational background, their main occupations, main source of income and their own ranking as to the family's wealth. A total of 742 families were surveyed, 282 in Sujani and 460 in Charbagh. Out of these, 130 families in Sujani and 344 families in Charbagh had school age sons and daughters.

To determine the border of the village turned out to be a problem in both places. The schools were located just outside the main villages and brought together children not only from the main village but also from satellite villages or distant settlements. This implied that these settlements should also be included in the survey since we wanted to include families with children in the school. However, no particular catchment area for the schools existed. So even though we did expand our area to some extent, all the students in the schools did not belong to the surveyed families.

Another problem was how to define the concept of family since most people lived in extended families. The assistants were instructed to collect data on nuclear families, to consider a married couple, a man and his wife (or wives), and their children as one family. We excluded families with only sons or only daughters. Consequently, our sample includes families with both school age sons and daughters. These families were grouped into different types according to the boys' and the girls' respective participation in the two schools available, the primary school of the Western type and the mosque school with Islamic education. The *madrasas* in both villages had attracted boys above the age of 15 – 16 years, which was over age according to our predetermined delimitations. Virtually all children attended the mosque school (a few children of young age who lived too far away from the mosque were the only exceptions). Thus we divided the families into three groups:

- 1) families with both sons and daughters in primary school;
- 2) families with sons in primary school and daughters at home; and,
- 3) families with neither sons nor daughters in primary school.

The first group was by far the biggest in both villages. To determine the second group turned out to be more problematic than we had foreseen. Families who explicitly rejected sending their daughters to school amounted to only two per cent. However, we soon found out that quite a few families in the first group had daughters they considered as “too big” and did not send them to school. They might have one daughter aged nine years in school and another girl aged eleven considered “too big” and who had left school already, in addition to enrolled sons. Such families remained in the first group. The third group was also small. We sought to interview representatives of all the families in the first group, either one or both of the parents or their children. Almost all parents (fathers) in the second and third groups were interviewed. In addition, we added a couple of interviews with fathers or mothers with only sons or only daughters who also belonged to the category with no children in school.

Most parents, almost all the mothers and a great majority of the fathers, had no formal education. Therefore, we purposively selected some of the few fathers with Western type of education in the first group. We also intentionally interviewed one of the few fathers who had ranked himself as wealthy.

## Interviews

As mentioned, the main technique in this study was in-depth, semi-structured interviews using interview guides with open-ended questions divided into themes and sub-themes. The interviews had mostly the character of a guided conversation in interaction with the respondents. In total, we interviewed far more than one hundred people. The primary sources were parents and students of the primary schools and the Islamic institutions. We interviewed a total of 47 parents and 32 children<sup>13</sup>. In addition, we interviewed eleven primary school teachers, two headmasters, seven mullahs, three officials of the Ministry of Education and three Islamic scholars. These are people who can be regarded as key informants since they possess particular knowledge about the concerned topic. The village teachers and mullahs were, however, interviewed about other issues as well. All were interviewed individually (with the exception of the girl students in Sujani, who wanted to come in pairs). In addition, we held focus group interviews with elders in the two villages, with students and teachers of the *madrasa* in Sujani and with girls who were out of school. Mostly, the interviews were tape recorded and but some of the mothers and a few mullahs did not agree to being recorded. Usually the interviews were transcribed the same day. We did the transcriptions together. Besides the proper interviews, conversations at the roadside, in the bazaar, in the mosque, on the schoolyard and in the compounds of the houses happened every now and then.

The mothers and fathers were selected from the three groups mentioned above. In the biggest groups, those with both boys and girls in both types of schools, we tried

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<sup>13</sup> Due to problems with tape recording we unfortunately lost three interviews (not included above).

to get a sample with a variety of economic situations, occupations and educational backgrounds. However, since the life standards were fairly equal - few had studied, most of the men were farmers, practically all women were housewives - there was very little variety in the background conditions. The ones selected from the second and third group represent special cases and apply to what is called purposeful sampling (Patton, 1987). In addition to the 23 students in the primary schools (eleven boys and twelve girls) with ages ranging from nine to 22 years<sup>14</sup>, nine out of school children (six boys and three girls) were interviewed. A total of 33 fathers (22 in Sujani and 11 in Charbagh) and 14 mothers (six in Sujani and eight in Charbagh) were interviewed.

Practically all interviews (except with the mothers) we carried out together. Amir posed most of the questions in Dari or Pashto, depending on the language preferred by the interviewee. At times, however, Pia posed some questions in English, partly in order to also include her in the interview and partly because some questions were too sensitive or too evident for Amir to pose. Then he made the translation and kind of disentangled himself from the inquiry. To interview mothers, it was necessary that Pia carried out these interviews alone with the help of an interpreter. Thus we hired a female translator, which turned out to be problematic in both places but particularly in Sujani. Very few English speaking (and bilingual in the Afghan languages) women were available. Those we found were not willing to travel by car for two hours daily on bumpy roads to visit poor houses and interview rural women. Finally, one volunteered but she gave up after two days. In Charbagh one young girl was available for four days. The difficulty in finding female translators is the reason why there were fewer mothers than fathers interviewed.

All parents in Sujani and all mothers in Charbagh were interviewed in their own homes, a place we preferred since we thought they would feel more at ease in their own surroundings. Often other family members were present too. Some fathers were interviewed outdoors, close to their work in the field or outside their houses. In Charbagh, we were advised not to walk around too much in the village for security reasons. The fathers were therefore summoned to come to the girls' school. The students and teachers were interviewed in the schools. Other children, mullahs, and elders were interviewed outdoors, in a guest room, in a mosque or at home. The interviews lasted from 30 minutes (with the younger children) to almost two hours. The focus group interviews lasted even longer.

In addition to the questions around the six themes mentioned above, background data was collected from each interviewee, such as age, occupation, place of origin, education (Western type and Islamic), main source of income, economic status and number of children. We compared this information with the information already collected by the surveyor. We also collected information about the children, such as sex and age, whether they participated or not in any type of education, if they had dropped out earlier, if they had been to school in refugee camps and so forth. Fathers and mothers

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<sup>14</sup>The oldest boy was 22 years and a student in grade six.

got the same questions but the responses from the mothers were generally more limited and it was seldom possible to ask follow up questions. Mullahs and teachers also got similar questions.

The surveyors made appointments with the interviewees. In all cases the contacted person showed up and was on time. In only one case was a father reluctant to be interviewed but finally agreed to meet with Amir alone. Otherwise people seemed to appreciate being interviewed. They willingly engaged in discussions, they appeared to talk freely and they promptly responded to all questions. The situation was at times different with the mothers, which was due in part to the inexperience of the translators. Some of the mothers with education seemed to be anxious to respond correctly and were careful not to be too personal. Others gave very short answers and one of them brusquely stopped Pia: “Now I have more important things to do. It is soon time for dinner”. But usually, mothers appeared delighted to be interviewed. One of the fathers said by the end of the interview: “Allah knows that I responded with my heart and knowledge”. Children, but not only children, came running and asked us to come to their house and talk. Some people waited for us in the morning and wanted to invite us in: “You must be our guests too”. Some of them said they felt selected. Such was the situation particularly in Sujani, where the general atmosphere was more relaxed compared to Charbagh where the ambience was a bit tense. The fact that we had to meet with the fathers in the school<sup>15</sup> probably contributed to the somewhat nervous situation. In addition, there was a more complex political situation in Charbagh (see *Chapter 11 Two Afghan Villages*). Still, also in Charbagh everyone shared his/her notions and ideas without much hesitation, although they were maybe somewhat more reluctant regarding issues that bordered on the political.

Nonetheless, being interviewed was a new experience for everyone in spite of the informal ambience we tried to create. To sit together with an unknown Afghan and a foreign woman, who recorded the conversation and took notes and who talked to each other in another language, was an unusual event to say the least. Probably, some of them felt embarrassed but managed to conceal it. Probably, some were suspicious and hid it (a few did not manage to). It is also likely that some of them did not say everything they had on their mind or, as mentioned earlier, provided more normative than real statements.

## Observations

As Patton (1987) states, observations and interviews are seldom separate and distinct data collection techniques. Neither were they in the present study. Observations were integrated with the interviews and observations reinforced the interpretation of the

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<sup>15</sup> For an explanation, see *Chapter 13 What is the Meaning?*

interview answers. We took field notes on non-verbal messages, reactions, interactions and relationships with the interviewers and others that accompanied the interviews. We also took notes on other activities and behaviours. For example, when interviewing a father many of his children were often around. How he treated his children could tell us more than a question about child rearing.

It is not possible to observe everything. We see what we want to see or “[t]he way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe” (Berger, 1973, cited in Wolcott, 1999). Besides the unstructured observations during interviews or when walking around, we made semi-structured observations in the schools. In both cases, we were affected (among other things) by our previous knowledge and experience of Afghan village life and schools as well as of our experience of education in general and of teaching in particular.

In Sujani, we observed some 40 lessons, out of which 15 were in the girl classes. All grades and all types of subjects (except sports) were covered, such as mathematics, Dari, Pashtu, Islamic subjects, social studies, natural science, calligraphy and drawing. In Charbagh, we observed around 25 lessons in six girl classes and four boy classes. Since the boy classes were located outdoors on a plain we were able to see many things “off the record” too. We used a form in which we recorded activities in the classroom, such as: instruction techniques (types of questions, lecturing, reading, writing); use of blackboard and textbooks (if available); student activities (responding, reading aloud or silent, writing); use of confirmations and corrections; and, teacher-student relationships. In Charbagh we recorded one lesson and transcribed it afterwards. Similarly, we observed the morning sessions in the mosque schools on seven occasions, four in Sujani and three in Charbagh. There we were also able to note interactions between boys and girls. We visited the Sujani *madrassa* briefly as well as the Quran schools (one for girls) in Charbagh. The observations also included data about the teaching location (classroom, tent or outdoors), school furniture, other types of equipment, and availability of textbooks and notebooks. The composition of students (age, sex, clothing) was noted too. Usually, the observations were summarised on a daily basis.

## Data processing and interpretations

The literature does not always differentiate between analysis and interpretation of data. We have found the distinction made by Patton (1987) adequate for describing the work we did with the data after (and during) the field studies. According to him, the two concepts involve two different processes. Analysis is a process of ordering the data, organising them into categories, patterns and descriptive units. In the interpretation process, meanings and significance are attached to the analysis, patterns are explained, and relationships and linkages are identified. As described previously, we entered the field with an interview guide of six themes, which were made up of the first categories:

knowledge, goals, teaching-learning, participation, gender and family culture.

After returning from the field, we started by reading all the interview answers theme by theme or category by category. Later, we read through the observation summaries and field notes. The first-thought categories proved useful in the beginning of the process but many others emerged during the process of analysis, a process that started already during data collection. Almost immediately we added a seventh category, globalisation, and moved questions about change into this group. Gradually, the categories were split into smaller and smaller units, units that were then merged with others, some issues were moved, new labels were created, denominators found, and so on. Numerous categorisations were made about various issues. There were mixtures of different levels of abstractions, sometimes related to or linked with background data and/or to similar or to contrasting questions. Again and again we looked through the categories, highlighted some and downsized others. When some pattern was found, we started the interpretation, trying to clarify and extend meanings of the verbal statements: What do they actually say? What do they mean? Why do they say so? Eventually, the process ended up in the four chapters of Part Four of this study. The initial six (or seven) categories boiled down to four ‘supercategories’, each with a number of subthemes. These categories include: a comparison of the educational systems (*Chapter 12 Maktab and Madrasa*); the meaning of education as attributed by parents, students, and teachers (*Chapter 13 What is the Meaning*); arguments for and against girls’ participation in education (*Chapter 14 Girls’ Education: Obligation and Separation*); and finally, globalisation and education (*Chapter 15 Global and Local Pressure on Education*). When we started to write a chapter, we often got new ideas and had to review the interpretation process once more. When a whole chapter was written, we read all the related field material again to ensure that the interpretations matched what people had actually said. At a few occasions they did not and we had to revise the interpretation; once or twice we found additional information to use. We have used a lot of quotations to give voice to peoples’ own views and also to support the interpretation we have made. Other types of information and references to literature and documents are sometimes interwoven with quotations so as to add and enrich the material.

This study balances description and interpretation in parallel accounts instead of presenting the findings in one part and the interpretations in another. We did this for two reasons. One reason is to give the reader greater possibilities to examine the interpretations close to the verbal statements. The second is that we believe that the text becomes more reader friendly and interesting when the two parts are interwoven.

Moreover, the study presents two folk models or folk theories (*Chapter 16 An Afghan Dilemma*), which represent the interpretations made by the respondents, or rather, our interpretations of their interpretations. There is, as Bryman (2004) points out, a double interpretation going on, “[i]ndeed there is a third level of interpretation going on, because the researcher’s interpretations have to be further interpreted in terms of the concepts, theories, and literature of a discipline” (p. 14). As mentioned, the present

study does not use deductive methods; hence no theory was tested and no hypotheses elaborated. However, the interpretations are, when applicable, related to the concepts in *Chapter 3 Conceptualisations*.

## Issues of reliability, generalisability and validity

Reliability, generalisability and validity are criteria developed for assessing quantitative research. There has been, and still is, a debate as to what extent these concepts are relevant or how they may be applied in qualitative research. Measurement issues are not a concern for qualitative researchers who acknowledge that there are not one single absolute ‘truth’ about the social world but many (Bryman, 2004).

Reliability deals with consistency and replicability. It refers to the extent to which a study can be replicated: whether a researcher using the same methods in a similar context would come up with the same results (Cohen et al., 2004). Since studies in social research deal with human beings and their interactions, and since attitudes, norms, values and expectations of human beings hardly can be exactly replicated, reliability is a complicated issue for qualitative research. The people, the researcher and the context would never be the same. Not even the questions would be identical. Even if the same words were used, the way they were posed and the way they were understood would differ. To get around this limitation, which basically has to be accepted, and to enhance reliability, the present study has attempted to describe the research process in detail, including the analytical and interpretation processes. Nonetheless, it has been difficult to provide a complete description of how we arrived at the final interpretations after we advanced from the initial categorisations. During our constant exchange and mutual inquiry, the interpretation for some phenomenon all of a sudden appeared. We had of course continuously categorised the different items, some of which were after a while deleted while others proved useful.

Generalisability or external validity refers to whether the results are context bound and specific or generalisable to other contexts (May, 1997). It has to be acknowledged that a single case study carried out with qualitative methods cannot be representative to the degree that the results can be completely generalisable. Thus, external validity constitutes a problem for qualitative research. This is the case also for this study. However, and although the results of the present case study may yield little beyond the particular settings, we claim that it is possible to allow for “reasonable extrapolation” of the findings. “Extrapolations are modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions” and can be “particularly useful when based on information-rich samples and designs” (Patton, 1987, p. 168). Based on the rich material, the various sources and methods as well as our previous experience of education in rural settings in Afghanistan, we ‘modestly



speculate' that the results may also be applicable to other villages in rural parts of the country.

Internal validity is related to issues of causality but also to the question of whether a study measures what it intends to measure. It has been defined as the degree to which the researcher's observations and the theories match each other (Bryman, 2004). In qualitative research, the internal validity is usually strong due to the research techniques used, the interpretations arrived at and the theoretical ideas that have been generated. The present study has applied triangulation, which has further increased the internal validity. Several sources and methods have been applied as described earlier. The internal validity is also strengthened by the fact that we have been two researchers, male and female, who have studied, analysed, and agreed on the interpretation of the same issues. To some extent we have also used respondent validation by using probing questions and by checking with respondents as to whether we interpreted their answers correctly. Moreover, the villages were revisited for additional data and for checking previous findings, which also adds to the internal validity.

Ecological validity has several definitions. For Bronfenbrenner (1979) it is "the extent to which the environment experienced by the subjects in a scientific investigation has the properties it is supposed or assumed to have by the investigator" (p. 29). We believe that the respondents in the two villages would be able to recognise themselves (as a collective) in our descriptions and interpretations. The folk theories we have formulated in, so to say, their place, indicate that this study can claim a relatively high degree of ecological validity.

Qualitative studies are more concerned with depth than with breadth (the preoccupation of quantitative research) and the present study attempts to provide what Geertz (1973) has called a "thick description", including "a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures" (p. 10). By providing a rich account with lots of quotations, the credibility of the present study is enhanced. Nevertheless, it is recognised that our interpretations are "fictions" in the sense that they are 'made' or 'fashioned' (ibid. p. 15) by us. They are our constructions.





# Part Two

## Conceptualisations



Photo: Pia Karlsson



## Chapter Three

# Education and Knowledge in Islam

Three words or concepts are frequently used when education in Islam is discussed. '*Tarbiya*', which is an Arabic word but used all over the Muslim world, is in English usually translated as 'education'. Roald (1994) brings up the wider meaning the word has in the Quran and among scholars, for example 'care' or 'taking care of', 'nourishment', 'guarding', 'to grow' or 'let grow'. In classical Islam the term means 'upbringing' but today its meaning relates more to 'lifelong learning' (ibid. p. 48). Consequently, *tarbiya* means education in a very broad sense. Another word, '*talim*' is often used interchangeably but has a somewhat narrower meaning, involving mainly mental activities. '*Tadib*', the third concept, refers to instruction in how to behave, of proper conduct (*adab*) (Boyle, 2004). In Afghanistan these same words are used in both Dari and Pashto and there *talim* means to possess or acquire knowledge through education (though not necessarily in institutionalised form) while *tarbiya* refers to the result of *talim*, moral behaviour or socially appreciated actions.

There are several ways of understanding the term Islamic education. For some people it applies to education in an Islamic country, a school where Islamic subjects are taught in addition to other secular subjects, such as English, history and mathematics. For others it is education according to or prescribed by Islam. Proponents of this idea usually think of a school with emphasis on Islamic subjects and with secular subjects integrated into an Islamic framework. Most common, though, is that Islamic education refers to teaching and learning about Islam, such as teaching of the Quran, the *hadiths* (sayings or actions by the Prophet Mohammad) and the *sira* (the biography of the Prophet), interpretations of the Quran, jurisprudence, history and culture of Islam, and Islamic ethics, etc. This is the meaning we use for Islamic education. We include all forms of instruction in mosques, in *madrasas* and in universities as well as teaching to all ages, from pre-school children to adults.

Western writers often use Quranic education to refer to Islamic education, which is misleading since it gives the impression that Islamic education only teaches (the memorisation of) the Quran. Such schools, *dar-ul-hefaz*, also exist, as mentioned previously, but historically, many other subjects besides the Quran were taught in Islamic schools. Similarly, contemporary Islamic studies include a number of Islamic topics in addition to Quran recitation.

In the post-colonial period and up until September 11, 2001, Islamic education did not attract much interest (with the exception of a few conferences for Islamist scholars). After the terrorist attacks, media, governments, international agencies, researchers and others turned their focus and attention to Islamic institutions of learning. The word

*madrassa* became common also in Westerners' vocabulary. Islamic schools have been described as sources of terrorism "suspected of fostering a medieval mind-set and violent militancy"<sup>16</sup> (Pohl, 2006, p. 390). The word for students in Islamic education, *taliban*, got a new meaning, at least in Western minds. Milligan (2006) suggests that this newly awakened interest for Islamic educational institutions is based on the assumption that the religious focus of this education is responsible for the growth of extremism and ensuing terrorism. Thus, the argument goes, it is urgent to separate the religious from the secular in education. Support for secular knowledge, which promotes modernisation and development, would clear up the radical Islamic education.

This chapter starts with an historical overview of Islamic education: how it started and the development of educational institutions, curriculum and instruction techniques. This is followed by a short account of the philosophy of education that developed when the Islamic civilisation was at its peak. The next part of this chapter describes contemporary Islamic education, in particular views on education and knowledge as elaborated upon by Islamic scholars and Islamists<sup>17</sup> in the postcolonial era.

## Historical roots of Islamic education

Islam, based on what is by Muslims believed to be the revealed words of Allah as depicted in the Quran, emerged in a predominantly illiterate society. The first revealed *aya* (verse) of the Quran, which starts *Iqra* (Read), has been taken as evidence of the importance of knowledge and education as prescribed in Islam. A well-known *hadith* states that education is compulsory for every Muslim, men as well as women. "Education For All" was advocated more than 1,400 years ago! To know the content of the Quran, or at least parts of it, was from the start an obligation and it is still compulsory for every Muslim to study The Book, that is, to recite and memorise, some or all of the

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<sup>16</sup> The attempt to institutionalise teaching of Islam in German public schools was labelled as "*Trojanisches Pferd der radikalen Muslime*" (the Trojan horse of radical Muslims) by Bassam Tibi, a German political scientist (Pohl, 2006, p. 390).

<sup>17</sup> Islamism is generally referred to as political Islam, with adherents "regard[ing] Islam as a body of ideas, values, beliefs and practices encompassing all spheres of life" (Roald, 1994). However, already from the beginning, Islam proposed a complete life system. The present study regards Islamism as a political movement, encompassing movements representing various political ideas, many of which can be positioned on the left to right scale. Two waves of Islamic revival are distinguished: the first beginning by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a response to Western colonialism and modernisation and the second emerging in the 1970s, reacting against globalisation, secularisation and unfulfilled promises of modernisation (Daun et al., 2004). Possibly, a third wave can be discerned after the collapse of the USSR and Islam's replacement of Communism as the world peril. Particularly after September 11, 2001, this resurgence can be seen as having two general directions: 1) Islamic reformist movements participating in elections, cooperating with NGOs on issues like human rights and women's empowerment, organising social welfare activities, etc.; and 2) violent groups attacking particularly the US world hegemony.

verses. Teaching and learning were considered highly important by the Prophet and his Caliphs, and when Islam expanded to Africa, Asia and Europe, educational institutions that taught the Quran also multiplied (Kadi, 2006).

## Educational institutions

The Islamic place for worship, the mosque, also became an institution for learning. There the Prophet gathered his adherents and transmitted the divine words of Allah, which had been revealed to him. After his death, the Mohammed's companions continued the teaching in the Medina and in other mosques<sup>18</sup>. They recalled, repeated and recited the Quran together, since the text had not yet been written down. To memorise the Quran was the only way to perpetuate the sacred text. These "learning circles" continued to function throughout the succeeding centuries in many areas and regions. Eventually, the learning included a variety of subjects. Besides the Quran and the *hadiths*, topics such as logic, grammar, algebra, geometry, physics and medicine were studied. Students could choose whatever subject they preferred and could attend for as long as they wished (Sarwar, 2001; Boyle, 2004; Gunther, 2006; Kadi, 2006;).

Another early learning institution was the *kuttab* (a place of writing, also called *maktab*) for younger pupils<sup>19</sup> who also attended on a voluntary basis. The students read and memorised the Quran and learned to recite the verses melodiously. When a verse was mastered the pupil got the teacher's approval and was assigned a new verse to read. If he did not get the teacher's consent he might be corporally punished (usually by a stick). Sometimes the students copied the verses with ink pens on wooden slates. Memorisation and recitation of the Quran was a core subject but basic religious duties as well as reading, writing and arithmetic were also taught (Boyle, 2004).

Only by the tenth century did the *madrasa* institution emerge. Originally it was located in a room adjacent to the mosque where travellers or homeless people used to stay (ibid.). *Madrasas* soon became boarding schools, generally located in cities, attracting students from a wide area. Initially, the majority of students were sons of the ruling elite (Kadi, 2006). The *madrasa* training provided the administrative and legal staff required for the expansion of Islam into new areas. By the 13th century some of the *madrasas* had developed into Islamic colleges and universities, e.g. in Cairo, Tunis, Fez and other places (Boyle, 2004). The *madrasa* was an institution "created expressly for the purpose of education" (Kadi, 2006, p. 315) and provided education from post-elementary to advanced level for teenaged and adult male students. Big *madrasas* were financed through endowments (consisting of shops, mills, buildings, land, libraries, etc.)

<sup>18</sup> Already by the end of the seventh century al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem and al-Umayyad mosque in Damascus were established as places of worship and learning. Al-Azhar mosque in Cairo was founded in 972 (Kadi, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Whether only boys attended and girls were excluded has not been possible to find out.

offered by influential and wealthy people. These patrons often exercised considerable control over the *madrasas*. *Madrasa* architecture were often “gems of Islamic art” (ibid. p. 315) with magnificent façades, and some of them had baths, hospitals, fountains, running water, lush gardens, domes and separate mosques with minarets (ibid.).

Few formal restrictions governed the Islamic schools, but any big and famous *madrasa*, of course, had an administrative and financial organisation (ibid.). Attendance was voluntary also in the *madrasas* and the students could come and go as time and want permitted. Schools were open for everybody regardless of background and education was free. The teacher and students sat on the floor or, if outdoors, on the bare ground. The teacher was like a facilitator or coach, working with one student at a time, and students learned at their own pace. There were no formal tests and those (few) students who memorised the entire Quran and also successfully mastered other Islamic subjects might pursue their studies in higher education institutions. Smaller Islamic schools were based on community contributions and were free from regulating authorities and restrictive procedures (Boyle, 2004; Gunther, 2006; Kadi, 2006).

These types of Islamic schools thrived throughout the centuries when Islamic civilisation prospered. Muslim intellectuals cultivated such varied disciplines as philosophy, medicine, astronomy, theology, law, mathematics, physics, prose and poetry and their texts eventually had a great influence on the European renaissance. From the 12<sup>th</sup> century, with the Mongol and Turkish invasions, the Crusades, the Reconquest in Spain and the closure of *ijtihad*<sup>20</sup> the Islamic civilisation gradually declined. The education system, however, survived. In all the Muslim countries of Asia and Africa mosque schools, *kuttabs*, *madrasas*, colleges and universities lived on, teaching virtually the same subjects with the same methods as applied by the early Islamic institutions.

## Education theories

The Islamic civilisation, particularly during the medieval period, includes rich and extensive literature not only in scientific areas but also in education philosophy (Gunther, 2006). According to Kadi (2006), the heights of the Islamic civilisation can only be explained by the excellent educational system of the time. All the brilliant scholars and outstanding scientists had, as a matter of fact, received their training in the then existing Islamic educational institutions. Some of these scholars produced theoretical works on education that included ideas, which to a reader today, appear astonishingly modern, such as views on children, the role of the teacher and the nature of learning. A rich literature on pedagogy and didactics exists, discussing goals of education and how to achieve

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<sup>20</sup> *Ijtihad* literally means ‘effort’ but has got the meaning of independent judgement in a legal or theological question. By the 11<sup>th</sup> century the development of Islamic law was considered complete and interpretations were no longer necessary. Muslims were to follow or imitate (*taqlid*). This is commonly referred to as the closing of the gate or door of *ijtihad* (e.g. Esposito, 1998).

these goals, curriculum issues, concepts of knowledge, learning styles, relationships between teacher and students, instruction techniques, teacher prerequisites, teacher and student behaviours, etc. They drew on features from the ancient Persian culture, Greek philosophy and Indian science; in particular the Greek/Hellenistic heritage inspired Islamic learning and knowledge (e.g. Ahmed, 1988). Education was not considered a “separate area of inquiry” but rather an “auxiliary science” (Kadi, 2006, p. 323) and those who wrote about education were theologians, philosophers, jurists, scientists, etc. (Gunther, 2006).

Ibn Sahnun (817 – 870), a jurist from Tunisia, was the first to write a handbook for elementary school teachers, *Rules of Conduct for Teachers*, which directs teachers to treat all students in a fair manner, to be patient, and to perform the teaching profession with modesty and passion. The teacher should refrain from instructing girls together with boys (an indication that mixed classes existed, or at least that girls also attended schools). The handbook also deals with issues ranging from curriculum and examination procedures to classroom equipment and methods for tackling disorderly students (Gunther, 2006). The Iraqi litterateur Al-Jahiz (ca 776 – 868) advised teachers to take students’ intellectual level into account when teaching, and to utilise a language they could understand. A teacher should seek to reach students’ hearts and treat them with care, gentleness and kindness. He also suggested that at a more advanced educational level, logical argumentation techniques as well as horsemanship, polo, chess and music should be included in the curriculum, in addition to religious and other subjects (Gunther, 2006).

Students have a natural desire for learning, which should be the point of departure for teaching according to Al-Farabi (d. 950), “the first truly eminent logician in Islam” (Gunther, 2006, p. 373). Teaching should build upon the student’s previous knowledge. Al-Farabi was an advocate of teaching as a somehow interactive process: the teacher is responsible for transmitting knowledge by using a variety of techniques with the student, and the student has the responsibility to work actively with new facts until he can use them in new contexts. Al-Farabi was the first to suggest an integrated curriculum with both ‘foreign’ and ‘religious’ sciences, the former based on Greek philosophy and science and the latter on the Quran and its interpretations. He clearly made a distinction between human and divine knowledge and instruction (Gunther, 2006).

The philosopher Ibn Sina (980 – 1037) emphasised that learning should be enjoyable and exciting. He also seems to be first to point out the significance of combining the teaching of reading and writing. He stressed as important the inner qualifications of the teacher: high ethics, decency, intelligence, honour, and kindness. Moreover, a teacher should be skillful in the art of teaching. Ibn Sina also elaborated on learning procedures. Besides our senses, two intellectual capacities are involved, the practical, which governs bodily movements and the theoretical, which, within the soul, allows for reasoning through four processes: 1) the potential to acquire knowledge, which serves; 2) the ability to use knowledge, which serves; 3) the ability to understand; and finally,



4) the ability to internalise knowledge (Gunther, 2006).

A teacher should teach with compassion and should not give too difficult tests to students since success is more important than failure in learning. This view was advocated by Al-Ghazali (1058 – 1111), a theologian and Sufist. Teachers should teach for free, “solely for the glory of God” (Gunther, 2006, p. 384). The aim of education is not only to transmit knowledge but also to facilitate the founding of a deep faith. Learning does not only take place in the mind, on the contrary, the soul or heart is at the core of all learning activities. Education brings knowledge and good morals to the heart. The heart is considered the “essence of man,” and it is through the heart one comprehends, learns and knows (ibid. p. 381). True knowledge is “a light which floods the heart” (p. 382). For Al-Ghazali, the prime aim of education was the study of the divine. His *Revival to the Excellence of Knowledge, Teaching and Learning* includes detailed advice on teaching methods, a teacher’s duties and responsibilities, and the proper behaviour of students and teachers. His directions “have long found their way into Muslim society” (Gunther, 2006, p. 382).

The historian Ibn Khaldun’s (1332 - 1406) elaborations on Islamic knowledge can, according to Nuseibeh (1993), be described as four “schools”. The first is “knowledge-through-transmission”, according to which “every humanly attainable truth can be found in the revealed text or can be logically extrapolated from ... that text” (p. 826). Humans are simply not able to attain each and every truth and a “to be a Muslim believer – to submit – is to accept that the human intellect is limited, and therefore [has] to resort to faith” (ibid.). The Quranic text is the only source of knowledge and readers may either strive to get full command of the content or develop the specific skills needed to extrapolate from it, i.e. analogical skills exercised by jurists, exegetes, grammarians and linguists. The second “school” is found among the practitioners of *kalam* (theology), which, although bound to the Quran as a fixed frame of reference, exercised their power of reasoning by addressing new questions, polemically using logic or methods of reasoning with a distinctive dialectical approach. The ontology of this group describes the world as “made up ultimately of primary, indivisible and indistinguishable atoms, which are held together through an external cause” (ibid. p. 828). Thirdly, there is the “knowledge-by-intellect” group, represented by, for example, Ibn Sina and Al-Farab. It was influenced by the sciences of the Greeks and the Syrians. These practitioners of *falsafah* (philosophy) tried to show that rational truth was real truth, while religious truth was an image of this truth (ibid.). For the fourth group, the mystics or the Sufi school, knowledge cannot be given a scientific or linguistic definition but rather must be described in metaphors and imagery. To know is to experience, see and feel.

Obviously, during the peak of Islamic civilisation, religion did not pose any limits to thought as the brief summary above indicates. On the contrary, the period allowed for a rich variety of meanings of knowledge as well what could be regarded as the essence of Islam. Science and religion were not regarded as two separate, conflicting parts of a duality. Scholars, like the ones mentioned above, appreciated logical reasoning as well

as religious (mystic) experience. There was not discord between reason and faith. Their ideas on teaching and learning have lived on to our days, in Islamic as well as in Western education. The two types of knowledge, the divine and the human, were acknowledged from the beginning. The call for integration of the two into one educational system, which is a concern for contemporary Islamists, was already being discussed in the eighth century. Also the aim of education was twofold: to deepen the faith of the students and to learn useful things for implementation in real life. Some of their views on didactics could easily be found in a present day textbook for teacher candidates. Examples of this include the necessity to adapt to students' level and their previous knowledge, to reinforce success and disregard failure, to motivate students and to employ a variety of instructional techniques. The idea (although not always realized) of a teacher as a person who deserves much respect is still alive in many Muslim countries as is the demand for a teacher to demonstrate high moral standards. Medieval writers stressed the teaching of ethics and Islamic moral and values continue to play a significant role in Islamic education, in fact, to instil good morals in the young is considered by many to be the most important role of education (see *Chapter 13 What is the Meaning*). Strikingly in the medieval literature on education there is a persistent emphasis on fair and compassionate treatment of children; using a modern buzzword, schools should be 'child-friendly'. Teachers (and other adults) should deal with children in a respectful and kind manner. In Afghanistan such views are still prominent today. Children are highly valued and it is considered a duty for adults to be caring and gentle towards children (which, in practice though, excludes neither bad words nor corporal punishment).

Starting in the twelfth century Islamic civilisation began to gradually decline. According to Arkoun (1994) one reason for this was that Islamic science, philosophy and culture had been tied to a city life (p. 79) with scholarly activities concentrated in the great metropolises where the commercial bourgeoisie demanded and needed knowledge and culture. The Islamic culture could not resist the "wartime ideology" represented by invaders and aggressors from the West and East and from then on "Muslims needed an orthodox, dogmatic, and rigid but ideologically effective Islam to rally around" (ibid., p. 80). After the twelfth century education became static, "rewriting and reinterpretation were hindered" (Talbani, 1996, p. 70). Education and knowledge no longer corresponded to the socioeconomic and political development. "In other words, outside the *madrassa* everything was changing and inside everything remained static" (ibid.). Religious brotherhoods, *marabouts*<sup>21</sup> and saints increased their influence, resulting in narrowed horizons. It was not until the nineteenth century that reformist movements revived Islamic thought (Arkoun, (1994).

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<sup>21</sup> Originally *marabouts* were a Muslim Brotherhood in North Africa. Over time individuals of the sect, in popular faith, have become saints that are worshipped and to whose graves people make pilgrimages.

## Contemporary Islamic Education

### Institutions and curricula

Under the colonial system, Christian missionary schools and colleges were founded in Muslim countries and Islamic schools languished or were quite concealed<sup>22</sup>. During the postcolonial period, Western type of education was implemented as the national educational system in most Muslim countries but Islamic education continued as a parallel or complementary system.

Contemporary Islamic education is diverse. It displays some variety with regards to contents, methods and organisation in different cultural contexts (Eickelman, 1985) although the major attributes are the same in most countries and replicate the characteristics of medieval Islamic education. Islamic education continues to be generally structured on three levels: elementary schools (mosque schools, *kuttabs*, Quran schools) for children aged 4-12 years; secondary schools (*madrasas*) for students of age 7- 20 years; and, higher education (Islamic universities or Faculties of Shariah at secular universities for adults) (Daun, et al., 2004). The traditional system still exists, that is, young children attend some type of *kuttab* or Quran school and then continue on to a *madrasa*, of traditional or “modern” type (the latter includes secular subjects in the curriculum) for shorter or longer periods of time. In some countries the elementary schools have become pre-school institutions. In the *kuttabs* of Morocco, for example, as described by Boyle (2000), children aged four to seven years learn to memorise some parts of the Quran and are taught by female teachers. In these and other types of Islamic pre-schools small children get prepared for the structured setting they will encounter in school. They are familiarised with school culture inasmuch as they acquire the expected behaviour of a pupil, become acquainted with letters and numbers and are prepared for how to learn and succeed in school. Then they may continue to a *madrasa* or to a primary school. In Afghanistan, the elementary level of Islamic education is offered in the mosque and is attended by four to five year old children as well as teenagers. For the latter group the mosque school is often a complement to primary school.

Mostly, Islamic schools at elementary level do not depend on the state but are community based, i.e. teachers are remunerated by the local community or by the parents. Pupils learn the five pillars of Islam, some Quranic verses, praying rituals and Islamic ethics. In addition, they learn the Arabic alphabet, some of them learn to read and write, and they study simple arithmetic (Daun, et al., 2004). Also the *madrasa* teaches the same subjects as it has for centuries, for example, Islamic theology, Islamic ethics, Islamic law, and Arabic language. There are no formal grades or stages and students start and finish at their own will. In addition, Islamic colleges and universities

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<sup>22</sup> Properties owned by religious organisations and *madrasas* were confiscated by the British in the Indian subcontinent (Talban, 1996).

exist in most Muslim countries and in some, such as Afghanistan, there is a Faculty of Shariah.

In some countries, for example in Egypt and Indonesia, more organised *madrasas* have emerged with state subsidies and control, approved curricula, grades and examinations similar to Western type of schools (ibid.). In some countries traditional *madrasas* are under pressure to accept state supervision in exchange for financial support. In some places, post-elementary Islamic education is provided through theological seminars including traditional subjects organised in stages (ibid.). The curriculum of Western type of education in Muslim countries reserves some hours per week for Islamic studies in primary and secondary schools.

For the large Muslim population in the North, the opportunities for Islamic education are varied. There is a great deal of diversity between national curricula as well as the amount of state control and state subsidies. Private Islamic schools with students attending on voluntary basis in their leisure time exist everywhere. However, only in England and the USA are there private Islamic schools (as well as schools of other faiths) that exist without subsidies that are considered legitimate in the sense that students receive recognised diplomas (although students often have to prove their knowledge by taking tests before continuing to higher education). In many countries, Islamic schools are integrated into the national system, receive subsidies, follow the national curricula and are monitored and controlled by the state. For many Muslim children, religious teaching is an extra-curricular activity (ibid.).

## Aims

The debate on education among contemporary Islamic scholars and Islamists has at times been lively. A number of books, theses and articles have been produced discussing aims of Islamic education, integration with or continued separation from the Western system, curriculum issues, instruction techniques, the concept of knowledge and the relation to the ancient heritage, etc.

Regarding the aim of Islamic education there seems to be agreement that the goal is development of the whole person. Education should “cater for the growth of man in all its aspects: spiritual, intellectual, imaginative, physical, scientific, linguistic, both individually and collectively ... the balanced development of the whole personality” (Sarwar, 2001, p. 29-30). Contrary to Western education with its emphasis on intellectual development, Islamic education is concerned with the soul or spirit, the heart, the self and the intellect (Boyle, 2004). Spiritual knowledge has the same importance as empirical and scientific knowledge and spiritual development is an integral part of education (ibid.). Sarwar (2001) adds that education should prepare “human beings for both life on this earth and the life after death” (p. 28). According to a lecturer we interviewed at the Faculty of Shariah at Kabul University, the aim of education is to

purify one's mind, soul and body so as to serve God. The best way to serve God, he claimed, is to serve human beings.

How to reach this aim? What to study and how to teach? What knowledge should students acquire and how should teachers act and behave? These issues are currently hotly debated, which the following short account shows.

## Views on education and knowledge

When Muslims think of knowledge, they think of what may be called 'knowledge for living', whereas when a Westerner thinks of knowledge, it is mainly of 'knowledge for power', that is, such knowledge as enables one to control natural and material objects and human individuals and societies. It is in respect of knowledge for living, consisting of religious and moral values, that Islam claims finality and self-sufficiency. (Watt, 1988, cited in Tibi, 1995, p. 1).

Muslims recognise two types of knowledge: revealed knowledge (*wahy*) and rational knowledge (*aql*). The former refers to the words of Allah as transmitted to the Prophet and later written down as the Quran. The latter applies to human knowledge, acquired through reasoning, "grounded in facts or data, either from nature, man's physical or psychological realities and the movements of history" (Wan Daud, 1989, p. 84). (For Talbani (1996), this acquired knowledge includes two types: transmitted traditions and rational knowledge). Coping with this epistemological dichotomy, revealed vs. rational, has been a concern for Islamic thinkers in their attempts to introduce Western sciences into Islam and establish a harmony between Islamic culture and "modern" (for lack of better term) knowledge. A fundamental principle for Muslims is unity: Islam aims at unity and wholeness at all levels and in all aspects and does not accept duality. It is noteworthy that the knowledge partition did not exist or did not present a problem for the successful scientists of the medieval Islamic civilisation. It seems as if this is the condition many contemporary Islamic scholars desire and strive for.

For Wan Daud (1989) the primary purpose of knowledge is to know Allah, which means to have "the knowledge concerning man's purpose in this universe and the knowledge regarding the fulfilment of that purpose" (ibid. p. 85). He describes five features of Islamic epistemology. First is the notion of Allah's total and complete knowledge, which embraces everything in the heaven and in the earth and all that a human being does, including his inner secrets. The source of all human knowledge is Allah.

Second, Islamic epistemology insists on truth and the ultimate indisputable and absolute, certain truth is from Allah. The only true knowledge is in accordance to the Quranic text, otherwise it is false, a conjecture or based on whims, ignorance or conceit.

However, this does not seem to be true in a literal sense, since Wan Daud claims that “man does and can know the extra-Quranic data” (p. 65). A judge at the Supreme Court in Kabul expressed a similar idea. “The Quran does not contain everything”, he said, “but we can find indications, signs or hints about everything” (Kashaf, 2005). Another interviewed scholar said that only “principles” are found in the Quran (Mohsini, 2005).

The third feature of knowledge in Islam, according to Wan Daud (1989), is its holistic and integrated nature, the inclusion of both religious and secular spheres: “[T]he Islamic *weltanschauung* does not admit the water-tight compartmentalisation between these concerns” (p. 66). The Quran urges human beings to observe and study the creations of heaven and earth and to travel and learn about civilisations. Such studies will assist and enable men to understand the meaning and spirit of Divine knowledge.

The fourth trait of the Islamic view on knowledge is the connection between knowledge and action. The one with knowledge should practice his understanding and transform his knowledge into good deeds. Fifth, similar to the relationship between knowledge and action, is the causal connection between knowledge and belief: “Knowledge should produce true belief (*iman*), while *iman* in turn should produce good deeds (*amal salih*), and therefore knowledge should produce *amal salih*” (p. 73). Deeds include religious duties and ritual obligations as well as moral, intellectual, social and/or economic efforts of personal or social significance.

Abdullah (1982) states that reasoning (*aql*) and revelation are complementary sources of knowledge. He further claims that “revealed knowledge cannot be grasped except with *aql*” (p. 104) and that “[*aql*] is also essential for revelation since the latter does not contain detailed knowledge concerning every aspect of human behaviour” (ibid.). He explains that reason is the “primary source in all aspects of life which are not touched upon by revealed knowledge” (ibid.). Reasoning is necessary for understanding new situations. But, he continues, “*aql* has no right to question the validity of or overrule any revealed principle or fact ... revealed knowledge is superior to knowledge acquired by *aql*” (ibid.).

In a follow-up report from the second research conference on Islamisation of knowledge, the separation of revelation and *aql* is deemed “utterly unacceptable” and “inimical to the whole spirit of Islam” (Hijra Centenary Committee, 1982, p. 24). However, the report does not, as Abdullah, regard revelation as superior to reason, instead it comprises, and as Roald (1994) points out, “an underlying presupposition that revelation could never contradict reason” and that “there is an equality of status between the two” (ibid. p. 75). The report states:

[T]he call of Islam was rational and critical. Invariably, it invited men to use their intelligence, to apply their critical faculties to all claims, to consider alternatives, always be cogent, coherent, to say nothing but the truth of which one is absolutely certain, always seek correspondence with reality.

... Without reason, the truths of revelation cannot be appreciated.... When acceptance of revelation is based not on reason, it is subjective, arbitrary, whimsical. ...The Muslims' exaggerated emphasis on the intuitive at the cost of reason opened the gates of corruption of the faith. ...Just as surely, the overemphasis of "reason" at the cost of intuitive faith corrupted the "life of reason" by reducing it to materialism, mechanism and meaninglessness" (Hijra Centenary Committee, 1982, p. 24 - 25).

## Faculties for acquisition of knowledge

The two types of knowledge require various modes of knowledge acquisition. God has given human beings the faculties of heart and intellect but also a third faculty, a faculty of spiritual character. Thus, in contrast to Western secular education, Islam recognises not only our capacities for sensory and mental perception but adds a spiritual sense, which is considered the highest level of perception. The whole person, the body, the mind and the spirit, are involved in the learning process (Haw, 1998).

Human beings are born with three attributes, all of which have significance for learning. The first is *fitra* (nature), which means that man is innately good from birth and has not inherited any sin as is claimed by Christianity (Abdullah, 1982). *Fitra* makes human beings inclined to believe in God. At birth, every child has the potential to become a Muslim but since a newborn does not possess any kind of knowledge s/he cannot be a believer at once. Knowledge is a prerequisite to becoming a Muslim. The environment determines whether children will develop their Islamic faith. However, the environment is not the only factor that shapes behaviour; the child is not a *Tabula Rasa*. The surrounding environment and conditions *interact* with the child's *fitra* (ibid.). *Fitra* is also explained as man's awareness of his inadequacy, which makes him yearn for the Complete and Absolute, i.e. for God (Abu Faris, cited in Roald, 1994).

The second attribute is *khalifa* (vicegerent or trusteeship), which means that man is Allah's vicegerent on the earth. This status implies certain responsibilities that can be upheld thanks to the characteristics that Allah has given every human being. Besides *fitra*, the soul or spirit is an important quality (Abdullah, 1989). Man's life is dependent on the existence of a soul in the body, the soul unites with the body. "Man's behaviour is the resultant of the interaction of the soul and the body... [man] is an integral personality. Behaviour cannot be described as purely pertaining to the soul or the body" (ibid. p. 65).

The third important attribute, which, as the others, has significance for the acquisition of knowledge or learning, is man's free will (ibid.). This principle appears at numerous occasions in the Quran, for example in 7:101:

*Say, 'The Truth is  
From your Lord*



*Let him who will,  
Believe, and let him  
Who will, reject it.*

Every human chooses his/her behaviour and is personally responsible for his/her conduct, both for overt actions and for intentions. The idea of a free will is important for learning. To believe that everything is predestined, for example failure or success, may promote passiveness and indifference. Achievements are then beyond the learner's command (ibid.).

## Learning techniques

Obeid (1994) argues that the Quran and the *hadiths* are written in such a way as to qualify as a theory of learning. The different methods used in the Quran to transmit the words of God are: 1) direct lecturing; 2) dialogues with questions and answers, some of which illustrate a chain of logic that leads to a conclusion; 3) repetition of words and phrases; 4) reinforcement through rewards or punishment; 5) metaphors or similes to illustrate abstract terms; and, 6) allegories or depicting of moral deeds, which serve as models.

Imitation and memorisation are principal pedagogical devices in Islamic education. Parents and teachers are expected to act as good models for children so as to motivate them to reproduce their behaviours or actions. Especially for transmission of moral values, models and examples are considered more effective than any other method, an idea that derives from the Prophet who is considered to be greatest model for Muslims to imitate.

Appreciation for memorisation as a learning technique originates from the time when the Quranic verses had to be memorised so as to be preserved. The Quran is believed to consist of the very words of Allah. They are, therefore, sacred and divine and absolute and immutable. To recall the text word by word and store them in one's memory was at first the only way to safeguard the verses to posterity. The fact that the Prophet himself as well as the first Muslims memorised the Quranic verses and that the text itself is considered divine are factors that contributed to the high esteem of memorisation as a learning method in general. Also after the Quran was written down memorisation remained necessary for illiterate people, a situation that still prevails in many parts of world. For Muslims with a mother tongue other than Arabic, memorisation is perhaps even more necessary for recalling the text (the Quran is in Arabic and cannot be translated since it is unalterable).

Memorisation is also a prerequisite for recitation of the verses. To read aloud the Quran either from the text or from memory is not just a matter of mechanical rattling



off. Reciting the *suras* (chapters)<sup>23</sup> and *ayas* (verses) requires a particular technique (to a Western ear it sounds like singing). To know how to perform a beautiful recitation is something worth striving for and the one who succeeds is highly appreciated.

Without memorisation of *ayas* a Muslim would be disabled since each of the five daily prayers consists of Quranic verses. Praying is one of the duties included in the concept of submission to God and is a ritual practised alone or together with others. Memorising the Quran and learning how to pray are essential parts of a child's socialisation in a Muslim community and are naturally what parents wish and expect their children to learn.

The Quran is necessary but not only for praying. It provides a moral framework for Muslims and gives advice on how to live both spiritually and socially. The Quran guides human behaviour in a number of ways, for example, everyone is counselled to respect and honour parents and elderly people, to be kind and soft towards children, to be fair and just in business relations, to be modest and disciplined, to pray five times a day, and not to eat pork or drink alcohol, etc. To know the Quran provides a life direction: "Quranic memorisation is an integral part of learning to be human and Muslim" (Eickelman, 1985, p. 63).

Boyle (2004) has brought to light how, according to Muslim thinkers, memorisation is just the first step in understanding: learning by heart does not replace comprehension but precedes it. She refers to the philosopher Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) who wrote that a child first must learn about the faith of Islam "so that he will hold it absolutely in memory" and then, the meaning will eventually unfold as the child grows older. "So, first, is the commitment to memory; then understanding; then belief and certainty and acceptance" (Al-Ghazali, quoted in Boyle, 2004 p. 84-85). It is like sowing a seed that later will grow into a plant of knowledge and comprehension. In her PhD thesis she concludes:

I have characterized Quranic memorization as a process of embodying the Quran in the minds and bodies of young children, rather than a process of mindless rote memorization, which indoctrinates children into Islam, as it has been previously characterized in much of the literature, especially literature from the West. Conceptualizing Quranic memorization as a process of embodiment highlights local views of what it means to memorize the Quran and why it is valuable. Quranic memorization is viewed by community members in Chefchouan [a Moroccan village; our remark] as a form of engraving, whereby the sacred words of God are etched onto the mind and body of the child, to be carried with them in an almost physical sense throughout the lifetime. Engraving of the Quran on the mind and body of the child effectively provides the child with a spiritual and social compass (Boyle, 2000, p. 57).

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<sup>23</sup> The Quran has 114 suras.

In addition, and maybe more importantly, memorisation of the Quranic verses is not the only way to reach an understanding of the meaning of the Quran. First, Islamic education, in Islamic as well as in other educational institutions, consists of a number of subjects and activities besides reading the Quran. Often these subjects and activities explain, comment, interpret and give reference to the Quran. Moreover, there is also a particular subject, *tafsir*, that is exclusively concerned with interpretations and explanations of the Quran. Secondly, references to the Quran are manifold in secular textbooks as well as in prose and poetry and metaphors and imagery are frequently used to illustrate the meaning of The Book. Thirdly, in daily life Muslims frequently use quotations from the Quran to guide, correct, explain or inform each other. This is a common behaviour also among illiterate people in Afghanistan. Fourthly, proverbs and sayings in Muslim societies are often, if not the direct words of the Quran, of similar meanings and content.

Thus, memorisation of the Quran does not solely take place within a formal educational setting. Understanding its meaning is aided through the social environment outside Islamic institutions and continues throughout a person's entire life. Learning in the Islamic context as pointed out by Eickelman (1985), is not "a separable institutional activity" (p. 65) but one that involves parents, siblings and other relatives as well as peers, friends and colleagues.

In the Western type of education memorisation is ruled out as mechanical learning without understanding and thus without the possibility for application in real life situations. Blind rote learning and mindless imitation are contrasted against critical thinking and analytical comprehension. Some contemporary Islamic scholars criticise the present teaching and learning in Islamic schools (e.g. Wan Daud, 1989) as being conservative, having low standards and for using corporal punishment but they consider memorisation, imitation and rational thinking as equally meaningful techniques for learning. According to Obeid (1994), learning in Islam combines memorisation and understanding. Rote memorisation, repetition to the letter without thought and reflection, has to be distinguished from the kind of memorisation that is encouraged by Islam (the Quran) which "enables the learner to establish associations between previously acquired knowledge and present situations" (ibid. p. 3021). Abdullah (1989) also argues against the misapprehension that memorisation excludes thinking and advocates the opposite: "Deep understanding and not mere rote learning should be encouraged... The Quran was not revealed to be memorised by rote learning but to be quite understood by the people" (p. 125). Already Al-Jahiz (ca 776 – 868) emphasised the need for combining memorisation and reasoning. To learn by memorising alone "harms deductive reasoning" and to use deductive reasoning only "harms learning by memorisation" (quoted in Gunther, 2006, p. 372). To neglect rational reflection will negatively affect the emergence of ideas while neglecting memorisation will negatively affect the ability to remember.

Boyle's (2004) notion of the embodiment of the Quran, that the not understood

but memorised verses have a “lasting effect of embodying the Quran in the beings of the ... students” (p. 89) and have a value in future pleasure and application, resembles Vygotsky’s idea of the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). This zone defines not yet matured functions in the process of development: they are ‘buds’ of development rather than ‘fruits’. The “distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” is the “zone of proximal development” (ibid. p. 86). Imitation plays a crucial role in learning. By imitating others in a collective setting children are able to perform much more than their actual level of development determines (ibid.). “[L]earning presupposes a specific social nature by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them” (ibid. p. 88). Whatever the “size” of the zone, or rather, the time span between ‘bud’ and ‘fruit’, it does not seem too far-reaching to have Vygotsky’s theory in mind when discussing memorisation as a learning technique. Children learn the Quranic verses (or, for that matter many other things in school) by heart without much understanding but through instruction from the teacher and by the help of older students (and assistance from the entire social environment) they gradually grasp content and meaning.

## Islamisation of education and knowledge

According to Roald (1994), many contemporary Islamists agree that the current educational system in Muslim countries is alien to Islamic values. The Hijra Centenary Committee report (1982) noted above argues that the Muslim community, the *ummah*, is suffering from a serious malaise as manifest in political fragmentation and alienation, economic backwardness, illiteracy, superstition and ignorance. Its main locus is found in the prevalent educational system (ibid.). The separation of Islamic education and Western type of education and the lack of an educational vision for the Muslim world are seen as the main causes to what is perceived as “de-islamization” and the “sinking morale of the college youth”. The lack of vision and the constant mimicking of Western materials, methodologies and ideas have produced “mediocritization” in the educational system. Graduates, “if not ... confirmed atheist[s], secularist[s] or communist[s]”, have a “view of Islam [that] has receded to the realm of personal, subjective and sentimental attachment to family and people” (ibid. p. 10).

The recommended solution is an amalgamation of the two systems of education and instilling a vision of Islam. The “emergent system must be infused with the spirit of Islam” and “it should not be allowed to remain an imitation of the West” (p. 11). “Nor may it be tolerated to serve merely the economic, pragmatic needs, ... personal advancement or material gain” (p. 11). Merging the two systems would eliminate their respective disadvantages, i.e. “the inadequacy of archaic textbooks and inexperienced

teachers in the traditional system, and the mimicry of the secular West ... in the secular” (p.12). The reform should be particularly applied to the university level since it is there the process of ‘de-Islamisation’ is considered most acute. This would, in practice, imply four years of compulsory Islamic studies for every student regardless of chosen academic major. Not only would all students add Islamic subjects to their studies, “modern knowledge” would be “Islamised” to replicate the disciplines as they were originally developed by Muslims and “integrated ... into the main corpus of Islamic knowledge ...” (p. 17). However, the writers are not really clear on this issue. From the above one might conclude that “Islamised knowledge” equals medieval knowledge but later the report states that modern disciplines first of all must be mastered completely and only afterwards should that particular knowledge be integrated into Islam by “eliminating, amending, reinterpreting and adapting its components as the world view of Islam and its values dictate” (p. 18) and

[t]o this end the methodological categories of Islam, namely, the unity of truth, the unity of knowledge, the unity of humanity, the unity of life, the telic character of creation, the subservience of creation to man and of man to God must replace the western categories and determine the perception and ordering of reality (p.20).

This Islamisation of knowledge is indeed a task of extraordinary magnitude and hard to accomplish: “[N]o Muslim has yet contemplated it enough to discern its prerequisites, or to articulate its constitutive steps and measures” (p. 18). This appears to be the dilemma for many of the Islamists who argue for Islamised knowledge in educational institutions. They agree on the calamity of the Western dominance of education and on the harm caused by the dichotomy. They argue intensively against the Western influence but have few tangible suggestions for how a united system would look and even fewer for how different subjects or disciplines could be changed, via content or teaching, if they were to be Islamised. Mostly, adding Islamic studies to the curriculum is the only substantial suggestion (see for example Husain & Ashraf, 1979; Al-Afendi & Baloch, 1981; Al-Faruqi & Nasseef, 1981).

One of the interviewed scholars in Kabul argued that it is impossible to Islamise mathematics, biology, chemistry or other natural science subjects since such disciplines are neutral: “They can be neither secular, nor Islamic, nor Islamised” (Mohsini, 2005). “But”, he continued, “when we talk about human sciences the situation is different: experimental sciences are the same in all cultures but humanities and social sciences should be Islamic in Muslim schools”.

Mawdudi (1903 – 1979), one of main figures of the Islamic resurgence, did, however, sketch out an Islamised curriculum from primary to higher education (Rauf, 1988). He blames traditional Islamic education for being outdated and irrelevant noting that it does not offer a solution to contemporary problems. The secular education system introduced by the British colonial rulers is no better since it brought about an

education “devoid of moral force” (p. 96). He feels that the attempts to blend religious and secular education have failed since “Nothing can be more preposterous than to assume that you can neutralize the baneful influence of secular education by simply tagging a small component of religious education onto the existing system”(p. 98). He suggests an entirely new system with the aim to “produce men who are inspired by the spirit of Islam, who are reliable and trustworthy in all positions of responsibility and who can efficiently run the administrative machinery of our social life along Islamic lines” (p.101). The “focal point” consists of “character-building” and “[w]hether engineers, scientists, social scientists or civil servants, they should invariably be an embodiment of Islamic virtues” (p. 103). First, “the compartmentalisation of secular and religious education should be eliminated” (p. 101). Then he continues by listing subjects which should be included in primary, secondary and higher education (such as basics of Islamic faith, Islamic Shariah, Arabic, the Quran, the *hadiths*, Islamic history and ethics). However, like others, his curriculum fails to prescribe how to avoid the compartmentalisation between secular and religious education. The “imperative measures” he suggests, which includes curriculum developers inspired by Islamic thinking, teachers with morally outstanding characters and an environment permeated with a truly Islamic spirit, do not appear to be sufficient for a completely integrated educational system.

What all integrationists seem to struggle with is how to materialise the Islamic principle of unity, and in this specific case, the unity of knowledge. They believe that science cannot and does not contradict the religion of Islam. It did not contradict it in medieval times when Islam as religion was spreading and when Islamic science gained ground. Islam is seen as a complete system, which includes both rational knowledge (science) and faith, and that ought to be reflected in the educational system.

In the aftermath of the conferences on Islamisation of education and as a result of the third wave of Islamist resurgence, alternatives both to traditional Islamic education and to public educational systems have emerged. In the Philippines, for example, nongovernmental Islamic schools offer education on weekends or as an alternative altogether to the public system, in an “endeavour to sustain an Islamic identity that has been largely ignored, if not openly disparaged ... from at least the American colonial period to the present” (Milligan, 2006). The schools are often integrated *madrasas*, run by a council consisting of Western-educated academics and local religious leaders. They provide education from kindergarten to high school with a secular curriculum as required by the government and Islamic studies including the Quran, the *sunna* (the Prophet’s sayings and actions), Islamic history and values and the Arabic language (ibid.). These schools emerged in response to the perception that public schools were failing to meet the academic as well as moral needs of Muslim children. Only Islam, it was argued, can offer the ethics needed to counter the social plagues of drug dealings, kidnappings, violence and crime. The Islamic school is regarded as “morally safe” (ibid.). Milligan argues that the space created by education decentralisation reforms

has been used to create Islamisation of education in the southern Philippines, “a development [that] is likely to be viewed with some alarm by Western observers who assume that secularization is crucial to education development” (ibid. p. 427). However, solutions to many societal problems may be found since the “motive energy” grows in the “spiritual, intellectual and cultural resources of Muslim Filipinos themselves” rather than in “imported ideals of civilisation...” (ibid. p. 428). Milligan believes that the integrated *madrasas* are likely to expand not least because “they are a result of and reliant on local initiative” (p. 429).

In Indonesia, quite a few *madrasas* cooperate with NGOs in community development activities, as inspired by Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich, for peace building, conflict resolution and interfaith dialogue or for empowerment of women. They offer training programmes, workshops and seminars related to these issues (Pohl, 2006).

The Islamist movement in Afghanistan, to the extent it exists today since most of the groups are either corrupted or silenced, has only been engaged in education to a small degree. Contemporary Islamists have not contributed to the debate nor to practical arrangements for Islamised education. Islamic schools follow the same path they have for centuries. Recently, though, the government has initiated support to and supervision of *madrasas* (see *Chapter 10 Afghanistan and Globalisation*).

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Islamic education has a long history. Educational institutions have offered education for children and adults in a number of different settings, with a variety of subjects and with teaching techniques that in many aspects appear very up-to-date. Educational philosophies were developed with ideas that could have been written today. The traditional Islamic education has continued to up to the present without much alteration.

Its long history and traditional structure and content are both a wealth and a predicament for contemporary Islamic education. It implies richness since all Muslims of the world share the same basic education and have done so for more than thousand years, and thus, there is a sense of belonging in time and space. It is also a problem since in the meeting with Western science and Western secular education, this principle of unity and wholeness has been difficult to apply in education. Reason and faith are entities, which for Muslims in general do not pose any contradiction but the idea of Islamisation of knowledge and education has so far not been realized in theory or practice. Rational, acquired knowledge and revealed knowledge are two kinds of knowledge, both of which are needed for a Muslim. This is something all our interviewees were very much aware of (see *Chapter 13 What is the Meaning?*).

Whether one type of knowledge is superior to the other or whether the two types are of equal importance is subject to diverse understandings. Similarly, there

are different interpretations of the view of the Quran as the source of all knowledge. The revealed text may, on the one hand, assume a literal significance, which implies a totally literal understanding of the Quran, or may, on the other hand, assume a symbolic importance, which then implies (to varying degrees) a metaphoric understanding (Nuseibeh, 1993).

## Chapter Four

# Education and Knowledge in Western Thought

Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, in addition to their other works, wrote about educational issues although they treated the matter in a very broad sense. As described in the previous chapter, they also inspired 8<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century Islamic scientists and theologians. Islamic thinkers interested in education in turn influenced Renaissance and Enlightenment philosophers in Europe such as John Locke, John Milton, Comenius and Rousseau (Saha & Zubrycki, 1994). Their writings dealt with educational issues such as teaching, learning, character moulding and moral education. However, it was not until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the treatises by Durkheim (1858-1917) that the relationship between society and education began to be explored (ibid.).

This chapter presents parts of some of the major Western theories of education, mainly those with a macro and sociological perspective. Although developed in capitalist and differentiated societies, some of these theoretical notions may also be applied to a pre-modern developing country influenced by globalisation and thus contribute to some insights and explanations of education in Afghanistan. Additionally, the chapter provides a short overview of the notion of knowledge as it has been conceptualised by Western thinkers, and, when applicable, contrasted to Islamic views on knowledge. Finally, since the present study deals with education in a developing country, a brief overview of the current thinking related to theories of education and development, including the role of women's education in development is found at the end of this chapter.

## Theories of education

### Education as function

A core interest of Durkheim was education's link to society. In his view, a function of education was to turn children into "ideal adults" so as to become useful members of the society. He saw education as a form of "methodical socialization" of the young into society. Every society is characterised by a shared culture with its own goals and values, which adults, through education, transmit to children and young people. Since cultures are different, educational systems vary considerably between countries. Education is an element in a society's structure and the educational system contributes to a society's



survival (Durkheim, 1973). Durkheim's idea that national cultures influence education and that a variety of educational systems would co-exist in the world has not sustained. In the present era of globalisation, education has, if not identical, a similar structure and content all over the world (see also *Chapter 6 Globalisation*).

The function of education in a society is to socialise humans so as to maintain order and stability and to that end education should foster the sort of people the society needs. According to Durkheim (1973), a society requires individuals with high moral standards. Durkheim was especially concerned with the maintenance of moral behaviours since he was active in a period when traditional social constraints and religious values were declining. He thought that modern societies required a new secular moral, based on reason, and that the cohesion of a society depended on a shared moral code of conduct and on common obligations and duties of benefit to individuals as well as the society at large (ibid.). To maintain consensus and solidarity in an increasingly differentiated society was one of his constant concerns. He was aware that a substitute must somehow be found for "those religious notions that for a long time have served as the vehicle for the most essential moral ideas" (ibid. p. 9). The need for a morale shared by all members of a society was also recognized by Islamic thinkers several hundred years earlier, as has been described in the previous chapter, and is still one of the justifications for education in Islamic countries today (see *Chapter 13 What is the Meaning?*).

According to Durkheim, human beings must be disciplined and constrained; indeed, this is essential for ensuring moral conduct. A sense of belonging to a social group is also necessary for the development of moral behaviour. Ethical conduct can never be forced or imposed upon the individual – nor is it necessary to do so since every human has an inner motivation to carry out moral deeds for the benefit of others (ibid.) "To act morally is to act of the collective interest" (ibid, p. 59), i.e. actions, which benefit society, are themselves moral actions. In school, children should learn to develop an understanding of the necessity to act morally and this understanding is acquired through reasoning exercises (ibid.).

Functionalists highlight principles such as 'achievement' and 'equality of opportunity', which are fundamental in modern societies. These principles imply that different educational achievements result in inequalities of income and status, which are acceptable since it is just, fair and normal that those who do well are rewarded. Anyone has the opportunity to succeed in education and in society (Blackledge & Hunt, 1985). It is necessary for a market economy to nurture the value of 'achievement' in order to "legitimate inequalities associated with different rewards attached to varying levels of achievement" (Turner & Mitchell, 1994, p. 22). The function of education is to "socialise" students to accept and internalise such notions, since without a common consensus on these ideas the society would fall apart. Given that everybody will not achieve high income and status, the school as the 'agency of socialisation', allocates different students different roles:

The socialization functions may be summed up as the development in individuals of the commitments and capacities which are essential prerequisites of their future role-performance. Commitments may be broken down in turn into two components: commitment to the implementation of the broad values of society, and commitment to the performance of a specific type of role within the structure of society (Parsons, 1961, cited in Blackledge & Hunt, 1985).

The allocation of specific roles is accomplished through the function of selection in education. Indeed, some of the later functionalists actually assume that the major function of education is selective.

In developing countries functionalism has dominated education theory and practice inasmuch as the functions of education are frequently used as justification for efforts to institutionalise the Western type of mass education. Typically, the function of education is considered to include not only the transmission of culture or preservation of knowledge, beliefs, values, and traditions, but also the teaching of new skills, new technological and scientific knowledge necessary for development and modernisation, allocation of individuals to different positions in society as well as indoctrination into a political culture (Turner & Mitchell, 1994).

## Education as utility

Economically oriented theorists have applied utilitarian assumptions to education. The most prominent of these is the human capital approach. At the micro level, parents and students are assumed to calculate the benefits of attending school, such as whether it will pay off in the end with a well-paid job, for example. The 'human capital', the educational credentials, is a resource the individual can use competitively in the market. From the society's perspective, education is an investment in the nation's human capital, which is used in order to increase productivity. The societal returns on education, therefore, come in the form of economic growth. The rate of return is considered essential for making an investment and this concept has been used as an argument for investing in education not least as regards women's education. Effectiveness and efficiency are core concepts in the utilitarian approach. Decentralisation, freedom of choice, school based management, educational vouchers, etc. are means to achieve higher productivity and increased economic growth (Turner & Mitchell, 1994). Utilitarianism has, with the spread of globalisation and the market ideology, again gained terrain after a period of set back when various conflict theories dominated education philosophy (see also *Chapter 6 Globalisation*).

Both the functionalist and the utilitarian approaches are useful when analysing education in a pre-modern society like Afghanistan, which suddenly and increasingly is influenced by globalisation forces. The function of Western type of education is to

socialise students into ‘modern’ human beings with knowledge and skills useful in the globalisation era. At first glance, conflict or Marxist theories, which are discussed below, appear to be less relevant for understanding the present Afghan educational system since the country is not characterised by an industrialised and capitalist economy with clear class divisions. Still, however, such theories may also be useful for understanding educational development in Afghanistan.

## Education as reproduction

According to Marxist theories, education perpetuates and reproduces class relations and the capitalist economic system (Blackledge & Hunt, 1985; Turner & Mitchell, 1994). The structural Marxists emphasise how the structures of society determine social behaviour. Education, being one of the structural institutions, serves the interest of the state, which is controlled by the capitalist class. Hence, education transmits and inculcates the ideology of the ruling class. Marxism regards schools as instruments of the ruling class for maintaining the “means of production” and the “relations of production” (Saha & Zubrycki, 1994). The educational system in a capitalist society is “an integral element in the reproduction of the prevailing class structure of society” (Bowles and Gintis, 1976, p. 125 - 26). Through education the young are taught their place in society. The idea that only those who are able and skilled or who have a higher education will succeed in society is imposed on pupils. Education functions as reproduction by means of justification, legitimation and socialisation and through the form rather than the content of the educational system (*ibid.*). Bowles and Gintis also argue that a hidden curriculum is taught in schools: schools produce the attitudes and features required for sustaining the capitalist system through “a close correspondence between the social relationships which govern personal interaction in the workplace and the social relationships of the educational system” (*ibid.* p. 12). This is also known as the correspondence argument. The structure of a work place is mirrored in the classroom with its emphasis on rules, authoritarianism, obedience and evaluations. It is a structure that rewards those who conform and punishes those who oppose. Students from different backgrounds are taught early on to accept their future niche in society (Turner & Mitchell, 1994).

However, more “humanistic” neo-Marxists like Gramsci argue that schools not only reflect the dominance of the ruling class but they are also instruments for social change and may even contribute to the overthrow of the capitalist system (Saha & Zubrycki, 1994). Schools as well as the culture of the students are relatively autonomous entities, which might allow for a transformation of the system; through development of critical consciousness, education may contribute to the resistance of the dominating ideology. Education is about cultural and economic reproduction but students do not just absorb the “hidden curriculum”. Students are individuals with their own values

and norms, which to some extent assists them in challenging the system (Blackledge & Hunt, 1985). There are contradictory tendencies, resistances and conflicts over the ideological reproduction forces. Thus:

the pressures and demands of dominant groups are highly mediated by the internal histories of educational institutions and by the needs and ideologies of the people who actually work in them, the aims and results will often be contradictory as well. Whatever the aims and results, however, there are real people being helped and harmed” (Apple, 1990, p. x-xi)

“Relations of domination, whether material or symbolic [cannot] possibly operate without implying, activating resistance” (Bourdieu, 1989, cited in Apple, 1990). This dual face of education can also be expressed as the

contradiction between capitalism and the modern democratic state which, on the one hand uses schools to socialize children in ways reproducing relations of production and, on the other hand, must respond to protests and movements demanding greater equality in the distribution of resources (Turner & Mitchell, 1994, p. 25).

The struggle between reproductive and democratic forces “can work at cross purposes with each other” (ibid.). It is ultimately a conflict over means, resources and relations of production but works at an ideological level as a struggle over the content and organisation of the educational system. The conflict represents the functions of the state: reproducing the relations of production and responding to the demands of the population. Recent Marxist approaches to education theory focus less on reproduction and resistance and more on the “marketization” of education, i.e. how the dominant feature of globalisation, the spread of market ideology, also penetrates education theory and practice (Saha & Zubrycki, 1994). Although not directly representing the conflicting parties as described by Marxists, an ideological struggle over education has been and still is evident in Afghanistan. This is elaborated upon later (see *Chapter 9 Education in Afghanistan*). The Afghan state is squeezed between demands from modernising forces and popular interests as to which type of education to subsidise. Moreover, privatisation of education is gaining ground.

According to Weberian-inspired theories, conflict in education is not primarily a class-driven process but rather a competition between status groups for whom education implies access to higher positions in society. The struggle between social groups or status groups is about preserving the control and power they possess as a result of their ownership of knowledge. For certain groups education implies specific advantages. Expansion of education in particular of higher education, does not occur as a response to societal needs but rather reflects the requirements of certain groups of society who

use education as markers of status or as capital (Turner & Mitchell, 1994).

Each class has a distinct *habitus*, determined by their level and configuration of social, cultural, economic and symbolic capital, and through the *habitus* and the school structures, the processes of class reproduction occurs (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). The culture of the dominant classes defines what is worth learning in school and the student's cultural capital determines whether s/he succeeds or fails (Bourdieu, 1973). Cultural capital also helps in the reproduction of social capital. For example: ruling classes know how to invest their cultural capital in order to maximize their economic profits and social gains, e.g. high ranking positions (ibid.). Through education, students acquire a certain language and they master patterns, codes of conduct, style, and manners or rules of the game, which influence their thinking and behaviour. The language and master-patterns belong to the ruling classes (Blackledge & Hunt, 1985).

The long wars left the Afghan people destitute and poverty was more or less equally shared. Class differences were not very apparent. However, after less than a decade of relative peace certain groups can be discerned. There are those with cultural capital, who were fortunate enough to get some education, mostly abroad, and those with economic capital, mostly earned by illegal means. Both groups, so far still very small minorities, do invest in education for their children, mainly for their sons, and they expect social as well as economic and political gains from this investment. Public education is still almost the only option but those with capital (cultural and/or economic) can employ private extra teachers and, when their children have completed their secondary education, they can be enrolled in the newly inaugurated private American University in Kabul.

## Knowledge

There is no single definition of knowledge on which there is agreement. Rather there are numerous theories and a continuous debate about the nature and scope of knowledge, the sources of knowledge, the acquisition of knowledge and the relation of knowledge to belief, truth and understanding. Philosophy, sociology, psychology, history and other disciplines deal with knowledge from various perspectives. The Greek philosopher Plato was among the first to investigate the essence of knowledge. The concept of knowledge, according to him, was justified true belief: to know something one has to believe it is true and one must have good reasons for the belief (Nationalencyclopedia, 1989). The rationalist thinkers of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, such as Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz, emphasised the role of reason in the acquisition of knowledge while the empiricists, including Locke, Berkeley and Hume, a century later only recognised knowledge acquired through our senses. Marx and subsequent philosophers of his spirit considered thinking and knowledge as socially determined: man's consciousness is determined by his social being.

The Islamic view of knowledge as spiritual and rational (see the previous chapter) has no correspondence in modern Western epistemology. However, a division of knowledge into three types is presented by Berlin and Magee (1978) (cited in Blackledge and Hunt, 1985). First there is *empirical knowledge* which answers “questions of fact which are settled by ordinary common sense or, in more complicated cases, by controlled observations, by experiments, by the confirmation of hypotheses, and so on” (ibid. p. 296). Then there is *formal knowledge*, which accepts “certain definitions, certain transformation rules about how to derive propositions, and rules of entailment which enable you to deduce conclusions from premises” (p. 296). Third, and finally, there is *philosophical knowledge* in which there are neither clear ways of making questions to find an answer nor precise factual responses. Moral, political, social, and emotional issues belong to the philosophical type of knowledge.

Another distinction has been made between declarative or theoretical knowledge and procedural or practical knowledge. Here the distinction is between knowing that and knowing how. Declarative knowledge consists of assertions about specific events, facts, empirical generalisations as well as scientific principles and central codes of political ideas and religious beliefs. Procedural knowledge, on the other hand, includes methods, plans, practices, procedures, strategies and the like. Thus declarative knowledge is descriptive while procedural knowledge is prescriptive (Ohlsson, 1994)

Berger & Luckman (1967) launched the idea of the human reality as a socially constructed reality and thus indicated that knowledge and reality are different in different social contexts. “[H]uman thought is founded in human activity in everyday life and in the social relations brought about by this activity” (p. 18). When a person encounters the reality and interacts with people s/he interprets it so as to make it understandable and meaningful. People share a common sense knowledge and take the reality of everyday life for granted as the reality:

This world becomes for him the dominant and definite reality. Its limits are set by nature, but, once constructed, this world acts back upon nature. In the dialectic between nature and the socially constructed world the human organism itself is transformed. In the same dialectic man produces reality and thereby produces himself (p. 204).

Knowledge is also socially distributed: different individuals possess different types of knowledge (ibid.). The school curriculum is one mechanism for a social distribution of knowledge (Young, 1978). Young also argues that knowledge is not something existing out there but is socially organised or constructed. The knowledge provided through the school curricula “is not a product like cars and bread, but a selection and organisation from the available knowledge at a particular time which involves conscious or unconscious choices” (p. 24). School curricula are structured around high-status knowledge, which is accorded in terms of certain criteria: it is abstract, relying on written

material; it is individualistic, focussing on assessment and avoiding cooperation; and, it is compartmentalised and unrelated to daily life and common experience. There is an implicit assumption that this kind of knowledge is superior. Students are accordingly defined as bright or unintelligent with regards to their being able or unable to enter the realm of abstract knowledge (Turner & Mitchell, 1994).

The status of knowledge in education has, according to Lamm (1998), passed through three paradigms. These paradigms stem from the role that has been assigned to educational knowledge: socialinstrumentalism, ritualism and developmental instrumentalism. According to the first ideology, the value of knowledge exists in its utility. Knowledge is worth acquiring if it is of use for people in their daily life, otherwise knowledge has only an ornamental value. The ritualistic approach views certain knowledge as having an intrinsic value, with such knowledge being required for the individual to rise to the level of human being. Religious and humanistic approaches are examples of the transmission of ritualistic knowledge. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a developmental instrumentalist view of knowledge replaced the others. In this case knowledge is viewed as an instrument for the individual to develop intellectual faculties. Knowledge activates and sharpens a person's mental abilities, at least when the learner is motivated and studies things s/he is interested in. With a child-centred approach in teaching and a student-centred curriculum, each individual can achieve his/her own potential.

The present study is concerned with two types of education, Islamic and Western type of education. That the reality of everyday life is taken for granted by those who live in it is obvious; see for example *Chapter 14 Girls' Education: Obligation and Separation*. In the meeting between the two educational systems and the meanings these systems represent, a new reality emerges. Direct participants in education, the students as well as indirect participants, the parents, continuously reconstruct their reality. This is particularly evident when they are confronted with the new experiences and influences a Western type of education brings (see *Chapter 15 Global and Local Pressure for Education* and *16 An Afghan Dilemma*).

## Education and development

In 2001 the international community, after years of neglecting the disastrous conditions of the Afghan people, again showed interest in the situation in Afghanistan. Education was launched as one of the most important measures that would carry the country back to peace and prosperous development. Education would bring stability and security. Education would bring an end to poverty. Education would bring economic development. Additionally the gains would be fairly equitably distributed and, as a consequence, living standards would rise (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2006a).



The unbridled conviction that education and development are strongly linked has a fairly long tradition. After World War II, it was generally believed that education was the means to increase the social and economic mobility of the poor. This belief resulted in massive investment in education and subsequent increases in school enrolment rates in Third world countries<sup>24</sup> (Farrell, 1998).

Initially, development was understood as solely economic, as an improvement in a country's productive capacity. Sometimes development was defined as a certain percentage of the annual increase in a country's gross national product (Saha & Fägerlind, 1998).

The human capital theory, mentioned earlier, has as an underlining assumption that there is a connection between education and development. For the individual, the benefit of education is a good job and higher lifetime earnings. For the society, education brings about higher productivity as a result of better educated workers. Moreover, there are other beneficial side effects such as reduced crime, increased social cohesion, improved health and nutrition, and not least, lower fertility rates (Psacharopoulos & Woodhall, 1985). When economic development has been defined in terms of rates of return to investment in education, it has been shown that in developing countries the rates of return to invest in primary schooling was 27 per cent, in secondary schooling 16 per cent and in higher education 13 per cent (Psacharopoulos, 1985, cited in Saha & Fägerlind, 1998).

The optimistic view of education as a social equaliser has gradually been replaced by a more pessimistic one. This is due to the inequalities in the distribution of educational opportunities, which have persisted or increased in most developing countries (Farrell, 1998). Urban children have benefited more from education programs, certain ethnic groups sometimes have had better access to education and, as a rule, boys have received more schooling than girls. Children of already well-to-do families have dominated student enrolments. The situation was worsened by the debt crisis of the 1980s and 1990s and the subsequent structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), which forced countries to decrease educational expenditures. The result was stagnating educational opportunities and deteriorating survival rates (*ibid.*).

Countries in the South have invested in mass schooling and copied Western educational institutions in order to advance or just show progress toward becoming a modern society. These measures have created high expectations, which have been unattainable. Mass education signals mass opportunity but education above primary level remains highly selective and, in addition, the wage labour market is very limited (Fuller, 1991). Large cohorts of graduates have joined the troops of the unemployed. It has become evident that education alone cannot bring economic development. Indeed, education may even have negative effects on economic growth as a consequence of brain drain and/or social disruption (Saha & Fägerlind, 1998).

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<sup>24</sup> Between 1960 and 1975 the number of children in school in developing countries increased by 122 per cent (Farrell, 1998).



Afghanistan is following other Third World countries by investing in mass education and likewise runs the risk of experiencing their same fate. In 2006, 53,000 students graduated from grade 12 to a next to non-existent labour market and to a very limited number of places in higher education institutions. The growing urban elite in Kabul, especially the younger generation who, if they have learned English, get well paid administrative jobs in Western organisations or contracts as less well paid translators. They are exposed to and tempted by the expatriates' Western life styles and high levels of consumption, and seem to gradually dissociate themselves from their original way of life.

The expectations about education as the major, or at least as the most essential factor for development in Third World countries after decolonisation have gradually been substituted with an understanding that the link between education and development does not present a simple cause-and-effect relationship. It is, on the contrary, a very complex issue. Gradually, development has been acknowledged to include social structures and institutions, political participation, reduction of poverty, gender equality, equal distribution of resources, etc. (Saha & Fägerlind, 1998). Evidence shows that schools are effective institutions for modernisation of a society; i.e., people with (higher) education adhere less to traditional customs and beliefs, have higher occupational aspirations, migrate more often to other countries, and pay less attention to family bonds (*ibid.*).

It has also been found that higher levels of education in developing countries result in increased interest and participation in politics, political socialisation, manifested in higher voter turnout in elections, solidarity and cohesion and low levels of conflict in the society (*ibid.*). New subjects like civic education and peace education have appeared as an effect of globalisation, aiming at fostering citizenship. "Political learning" may, however, socialise students to favour change instead of stability (*ibid.*). In Afghanistan, rapid change and disproportionate attention to Western type of education as opposed to traditional learning in Islamic schools have caused reactions by the bulk of population that may jeopardise rather than promote peace and stability.

The focus on opportunity or access to education for everyone (schools free of direct costs, similar facilities and the same curricula, compulsory attendance, etc.) was thought to bring equality in education and, in the long run, a more equitable society. However, it became increasingly apparent that many children, in particular girls, were unable to use the educational opportunities – they never started or dropped out of school. Gender inequalities in education are persistent and remain extensive. Women still account for about two-thirds of adult illiteracy, the same as in 1990s (UNDP, 2006). The gender equity gap in primary education enrolment is narrowing but large disparities remain at the secondary and tertiary levels (*ibid.*). Two thirds of all those without access to education are girls and women (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005). As many as 65 million girls never start school at all and some 100 million never complete primary education (*ibid.*).

The instrumental orientation that education of girls and women will result in economic growth, social equality, political stability, and so forth, is still the most widely used approach by development assistance organisations (Unterhalter, 2007). Such arguments for increasing girls' participation in education are partially being abolished in favour of a rights perspective: education is a basic human right and has an intrinsic value. The goal is not only to attain gender parity in education but the aspiration is wider: to attain gender equality (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005). This approach concentrates on legal reforms and institution building but "fails to capture or address the complexity of many informal gender inequalities" (Unterhalter, 2007, p. xiii). Unterhalter (2005) has identified four approaches to gender education, development and equality, which have prevailed since the 1970s. Three of these are described in Table 4.1<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> The post-structuralist approach has been left out since it seldom considers gender and education in development settings.

Table 4.1: Gender, education and development: contrasting frameworks

Period	Framework	Linked theories	Understanding of gender	Understanding of development	Understanding of education	Understanding of equality
From the 1970s to the present	Women in Development (WID)	Modernisation Human- Capital Theory	Gender = women and girls	Efficiency Economic growth	Schooling	Expansion of education. Equal access. Gender parity
From the 1980s to the present	Gender and Development (GAD)	Marxism Structuralism	Gender is part of complex changing social relations. Gender is a social construction determining social relations and roles.	Inequity and oppression. Discrimination Resistance	Conscientisation Empowerment	Redistribution of power Gender equity
From the 1990s to the present	Human development	(Meta-theory) The Capability Approach	Rights and capabilities	Development as freedom	A basic capability	Equality of rights and capabilities

Source: Adapted from Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005

The Women in Development (WID) approach has the longest history and the most powerful advocates in governments, agencies and NGOs, and has, for example addressed issues like employment of female teachers as a means to achieve gender parity in schools. Gender and Development (GAD) theorists have argued that changing inequalities and discrimination in education and work is a political issue and must be addressed by legal means. The GAD approach has, for example, resulted in gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting as planning tools for policymakers. The Capability Approach was developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum and addresses definitions of rights to education and evaluations of equality, an approach that is in sharp contrast to the human capital approach in its evaluation of what each individual has reason to value (Unterhalter, 2005). It is a kind of moral approach of “valuing freedoms and affirming rights as ethical obligations of each person to another” (ibid. p. 28).

Girls’ education in Afghanistan has attracted worldwide attention. The arguments have focussed on education as a woman’s right issue but also to some extent as a means to attain social and economic development. It was expected that improved access to education would increase girls’ enrolment ratios, however, it remains at some 30-35 per cent. The need for girls’ labour in the household is generally understood as the major cause for girls’ low participation in education. However, ideas based on social and cultural values may have more significance for girls’ enrolment and retention in education (see *Chapter 14 Girls’ Education: Obligation and Separation*).

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The optimistic view of education that dominated the world after World War II and during the period of decolonisation regarded education as a means for social reconstruction has been replaced by neoliberal views with a focus on market ideology. Theories of education and development have also embraced a gender perspective. A human rights perspective is now, together with human capital theory, dominating the gender education and development discourse. Education in the present era of globalisation is further discussed in *Chapter 6 Globalisation* and the effects of globalisation on education in Afghanistan are elaborated upon in *Chapter 10 Afghanistan and Globalisation*.



## Chapter Five

# Gender in Western Theory and in Islam

In most societies, the behaviours expected from men and women present rigid stereotypes difficult to eradicate. Men are expected to be task oriented, forceful, rational and effective and women soft, emotional, obedient and intuitive. Men must be intellectual, curious and competitive while women should be caring and nurturing, unselfish and modest. From early childhood, these stereotypes are strengthened in the family. Gender roles are also reinforced through games and plays. Maybe the strongest reinforcement occurs in school, not least through messages and pictures in the textbooks (Stromquist, 1999).

In the middle of the 1970s the social category gender was distinguished from the biological concept of sex<sup>26</sup>. Gender and its expressions, masculinity and femininity, were perceived as a social construction rather than a biologically determined identity. Sex is female or male, man or woman, girl or boy but gender refers to the different roles and learned behaviour of males and females that are tacitly agreed upon among members of a culture (Pilcher, 2001). The gender system of a society regulates the relations between men and women and the social rules governing gender vary depending upon the culture. The socially constructed identities distribute roles, expectations, tasks, rewards, rights and duties according to prevailing cultural and social norms and power relations in a society (Borgström, 2007). The perception of gender differences in a society may vary depending on the perspective of the onlooker, whether an insider or outsider, male or female and on his/her political conviction.

Gender relations have from Islam's beginning attracted much interest and debate. One whole chapter of the Quran deals with women. There is a number of *hadiths* about gender relations. Until recently, interpretations of Islamic sources have exclusively been made by men (which is also true for other religious texts). This has had a strong influence on how gender roles and gender relations have developed in Muslim countries. Maybe more important, though, is the fact that the majority of Muslim countries are characterised by a long established patriarchal system. The issue of gender in Islam has come out as one of the matters that have attracted intense attention, by male and female Islamists, by Muslim and Western feminists and not least, by Western media. From the latter standpoint, Muslim women must be liberated from the Islamic bondage. From within, female Islamic researchers seek to reinterpret the Islamic sources so as to develop gender equality within an Islamic framework.

This chapter presents an overview of gender issues in Islam, how they are

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<sup>26</sup> Separation of the two concepts originates from Ann Oakley's (1972) study *Sex, Gender and Society* (Dillabough, 2006b).

described in the Islamic sources and how they have been interpreted historically and today. First, however, is a presentation of gender theories in the West. There is a short overview of the landmarks women, in spite of persisting inequalities, have achieved as reported by UN statistics and reports. This is followed by an account of reasons for the existing gender inequalities as described by various theories.

## Gender theories in the West

Women, according to Bourdieu (2006), have two contradictory properties. First, all women have certain things in common in that they “are separated from men by a negative symbolic coefficient ... which negatively affects everything they are and do” (p. 95). Due to this phenomenon women are joined together as a group regardless of positions they hold in society. Thus a woman in a high management position daily shares the experience of being a woman with a low-paid immigrant cleaning-woman. Second, women are separated from each other by economic, social and cultural differences, which affect how they experience, tackle and suffer from male domination. The domination of men is established in the family, in education, in work, and in media.

Explanations of gender differences and gender inequalities vary over time and context and depend on the theoretical approach. Feminist theories and gender theories are terms often used interchangeably. Feminist or gender theory encompasses work in many disciplines, for example anthropology, sociology, economics, literature, philosophy and women’s and gender studies. Attempts to explain gender relations, gender differences and the nature and cause of gender inequalities vary. So do the suggested strategies to reduce or eradicate gender discrimination and the promotion of women’s rights and interests. Studies and research on gender relations, patterns of behaviour, male and female positioning and social organisation are enormous in their complexity and scope. They involve disparate matters such as treatment of boys and girls in school, male and female social responsibilities, access to resources and opportunities, power and influence, subordination and domination, values and attitudes, reproduction and sexuality, domestic labour, violence in home, working conditions and salary levelling, and the list goes on. Political, cultural, economic and social forces are involved. Theories that attempt to address such a variety of issues are by nature multiple, overlapping and mixed.

Lately, research in gender relations has increasingly focussed on boys and men. The general underachievement of boys in school is one aspect of what has been called “the crisis of masculinity” (Arnot & Mac an Ghaill, 2006).

## Gender separation

Practically all societies are distinguished by gender separation in varying degrees. Men are elevated over women, and the activities men practice have a higher status compared to women's. The same system of gender structures is, in all essential features, found throughout the centuries and across the world, regardless of economic and social differences. Societies are "organized through and according to the principle of the primacy of masculinity" (Bourdieu, 2006, p. 91) although substantial changes have occurred in education, modes of production, division of labour and political representation during the last century. Masculine domination has been going on as long as there have been men and women and the masculine order has been continuously reproduced (ibid.). The family usually employs a division of labour based on gender, and the children, from an early age, experience this separation. The family plays a significant role in this reproduction, Bourdieu explains, together with the Christian church and the educational system. The church, with its "dogma of the radical inferiority of women" is "entirely dominated by patriarchal values" (ibid. p. 92). The educational system has persistently contributed to "convey archaic thoughts and models and an official discourse on the second sex" (p. 93). The patriarchal family has its counterpart in the patriarchal state, which has ratified the reproduction of gender division and the patriarchal principle as a "*moral order*" (p. 93; [italics in original]). Patriarchy is defined by Walby (1990, cited in Pilcher, 2001) as "a system of social structures<sup>27</sup> and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (p. 75). Private patriarchy exists in the family where women are confined to household activities. In society, public patriarchy governs, even when women are not excluded from public life they are still discriminated against, for example, as workers (ibid.).

However, the subordination of women can no longer be taken for granted. Women's movements have succeeded in making positive changes in the conditions of women, at least for white, middle class women in the North. These movements together with the United Nations and through conferences and conventions have highlighted the situations women face. An example is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) that was adopted in 1979, and eventually signed by 165 nation-states.

In the area of education, girls increasingly attend secondary and tertiary education. In work life women increasingly take up salaried positions, and, due to decreased domestic work and smaller families, women participate in public activities to a larger extent than ever before. One result is "a marked increase in self-confidence and self-esteem" among women (Phillips, 1998, cited in Arnot & Mac an Ghaill, 2006). The most crucial factor for breaking male dominance is, according to, Bourdieu (2006) among others, the development of the educational system. Education, together with

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<sup>27</sup> Six structures are identified: household production, paid work, the state, male violence, sexuality, culture (Pilcher, 2001)



the development of the labour market, has implied the creation of work opportunities in large public and private bureaucracies and in the social sector. One of the outcomes is women's increased economic independence. The fact that men and boys take up traditional female activities, albeit at a small scale, such as childcare at home (paternal leave) and at work in day-care institutions, is also an indicator of a changing gender order. However, women's progress corresponds to progress made by men, "so that, as in a handicap race, the structure of gaps is maintained" (ibid., p. 94).

Women occupy positions in several fields but only exceptionally hold posts of authority and responsibility. As managers they work at intermediate levels and seldom reach top positions. As employees in government authorities, they have the lowest and the most insecure positions. They are paid less and they tend to hold part-time positions, which is an effective way of excluding women from decision-making positions. Moreover, their field of work is still in occupations close to traditional female activities. Men hold the public sphere and the power arenas while women are assigned the private, domestic space, or "quasi-extensions" of the same. Examples of these are welfare services like teaching and caring or administration and the "domain of symbolic production", such as journalism, marketing, sales, public relations, design, arts, etc. (Bourdieu, 2006, p. 94). In addition, when professions, previously held by a majority of men have become feminised, they are devalued or decline (ibid.). Behind this persistent gender division there are three principles: a) only extension of domestic functions are appropriate for women (education, care, service); b) women can not have power over men; and, c) men have a monopoly over technical things (ibid.). With a few exceptions, men control technology such as the weapons industry, they also staff and control the armed services, the police, the judicial system and men have almost all the top positions in international corporations and agencies (Connell, 2006). "The visible changes that have affected the condition of women mask the permanence of the invisible structure" (Bourdieu, 2006, p. 99).

Information regarding the conditions of women on a global scale can, to some extent, be found in the annual United Nations Development Program (UNDP) indexes. The Human Development Index (HDI) measures the average achievements in a country on a 100-point scale using three basic dimensions of human development: levels of health (life expectancy at birth); knowledge (adult literacy and education); and, standard of living (real per capita income). Among the 25 countries at the top of the HDI rankings the average life expectancy for women was 82.1 years and for men 76.5 years in 2006. The corresponding age for women and men in the 25 countries at the bottom was 42.6 years and 45.8 respectively (UNDP, 2007). This shows that the life expectancy was higher for women compared to men in rich countries while the opposite was the case in the poorest countries. The fact that female life expectancy is decreasing relative to male life expectancy is a trend particularly evident in Sub-Saharan Africa due to women's rising share of HIV/AIDS infections. Women are hit by HIV three times more than men, a gender bias, which possibly is due to early marriages

and sexual debuts (*ibid.*). As regards education, women in the South still accounted for about two-thirds of adult illiteracy, a share that has remained constant since the 1990s. Net primary enrolment rates have increased across the South with narrowing gender disparities while large differences remain at secondary and tertiary levels. At the primary level, the ratio of girls to boys was, for example, in India 0.97, in Burkina Faso 0.80 and in Yemen 0.72. At secondary level, the corresponding ratios were 0.81, 0.69 and 0.48 and at tertiary level the ratios were 0.70, 0.31 and 0.38. Poverty has fallen in all regions of the world since the 1990s with the exception of Sub-Saharan Africa where half the region's population live on less than \$1 a day, a situation that affects women and children the most (*ibid.*).

The Gender Development Index (GDI) measures the same dimensions as the HDI but takes note of inequality in achievement between women and men. In the last report, 177 countries were included (Afghanistan was not) and in the 20 countries at the bottom (all in Africa) 11 to 59 per cent of the women were literate while the literacy rate for men ranked between 26 and 82 per cent. The lowest enrolment rates in schools were found in Niger with 18 per cent girls and Burkina Faso with 23 per cent; corresponding figures for boys were 25 and 30 per cent, respectively (*ibid.*). Two thirds of one billion people in the world with little or no education were girls and women in 2003 (UNESCO, 2005, cited in Unterhalter, 2006). Some countries had higher HDI than GDI in 2006, for example Saudi Arabia, Oman, Japan, Nicaragua and Pakistan. The opposite was true in countries such as the former socialist republics in Eastern Europe, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Kenya and the Dominican Republic (UNDP, 2007).

The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is a measure of agency. It evaluates gender inequality in three key areas: seats in parliament held by women; women as legislators, senior officials/managers, professional/technical workers; and, female income in relation to male income. In no country do women have 50 per cent of the parliamentary seats. Sweden and Rwanda have the largest share of women in the legislative assemblies. In both countries women held 45.3 per cent of the seats followed by Costa Rica with 38.8 per cent. Of the 171 countries with data on female parliamentarians only 33 countries, out of which 12 countries were in the West, had female representation exceeding 25 per cent of the seats<sup>28</sup> (*ibid.*). World-wide, 93 per cent of all cabinet members were men in 1996 (Connell, 2006). The data on the other areas measured (professions and income) refer mainly to countries in the North. In the top 30 countries women constituted almost 50 per cent of the work force but held only some 30 per cent of senior positions. Their income corresponded to, on average, 60 per cent of the men's (UNDP, 2007).

A woman's situation may alter during her life span. In developing countries, women often gain more freedom, power and authority with age. Released from many household tasks by daughters and daughters-in-law, they tend to have more egalitarian relations with their husbands and increased status in society (Stromquist,

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<sup>28</sup> In 2007, 25 per cent of the Afghan parliamentarians were women.

1999). In modern societies, though, older women's social value is devaluated, maybe as a result of "the mass media and advertisements [conveying] the message that only young women are beautiful" (Inglehart, 2003, p. 168). According to Inglehart's surveys, women above 45 years of age do not have the same levels of happiness, life satisfaction and other measures of subjective well-being as younger women or as men of the same age have (ibid.).

## Explaining inequalities

Gender theories take one of two main approaches: either the gender difference is innate or it is socially constructed (Francis, 2006). In other words, the two approaches can be described as biologically determined differences or differences caused by societal and cultural conditions. In both approaches there are several sub-groups. In the former, we find for example evolutionary psychologists who regard sex differences as having developed according to Darwin's principles, and others who propagate brain differences as explanations (ibid.). In general, gender differences are seen as natural, inevitable and unchangeable. In spite of obvious changes that have occurred, proponents of these ideas continue to appear, although infrequently and with decreased backing.

The second approach includes feminists of many different types, sharing, though, the notion that the social order is decisive in producing different behaviours. Roughly, there are three waves of feminist theories: the first included liberal feminism; the second elaborated sex-role theories and social constructivist analyses; and, the third included post-structuralist interpretations of gender, identity and sexuality (Francis, 1999; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third-wave\\_feminism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third-wave_feminism)).

Initially, however, the "woman question" was confined to issues of family, emotion and sexuality. For the "classics" (e.g. Spencer, Comte and Durkheim) men and women were considered to be innately different and unequal. Women have smaller brains than men, which render them deficient in reasoning abilities, intellectually inferior, in a state of perpetual infancy and fit only for family and domestic life. Women were considered instinctive and emotional while men were complex and logical (Saltzman Chafetz, 1999). The early Marxist thinkers did not pay much attention to gender inequalities although they were aware of the fact that gender arrangements were a product of the society and unequal. Since gender inequities were a by-product of social class injustice, the solution would be found when the capitalist system was overthrown (ibid.). From a functionalist perspective, an example being Talcott Parson, gender roles are viewed as complementary: men have an instrumental role as breadwinners while women have an expressive role as producer of "human personalities" within the family household (ibid.).

Central for liberal feminism in the analysis of gender inequalities is the practices and expectations entrenched in the legal systems, family institutions, social

conventions and, in particular, the educational system (Francis, 2006). The aim for the liberal feminists was to get access to the same domains as men in politics, economics and education. Their main strategy was to achieve a transformation of the judiciary system. The problem with liberal feminism, as claimed by Davies (1994), is the emphasis on individual femininity (successful women as individual role models), which makes it difficult to join with other women. In addition, it creates a clash between the requirement to maintain a female identity and to simultaneously adapt to masculine requirements. Another problem, she argues, is that liberal feminism “relies on the dominance and centrality of rational thought in the human psyche ...[but] being a person entails more than having a “rational mind” (Davies, 1994, p. 2454). Access alone does not solve the problem: in school as in work, females are “sexualised beings, objects to male attention” (ibid.). Maleness, male ways of being, male knowledge, and male superiority are left unquestioned and are even desired by women (ibid.).

In opposition to the liberal approach but also a part of the first wave is radical feminism. This line of thought maintains that women’s way of being and doing is superior to men’s. According to their strategy, women and girls should be removed from the oppressive male presence in order to value themselves. Single-sex classes, for example, are an important measure (ibid.).

The sex-role theory, dominant in the 1970s and 1980s, criticised the way education, particularly the school, shaped the male and female behaviour to “conform to gender distinctions derived from biological essentialism” (Dillabough, 2006a, p. 48). The concept of gender was uncoupled from normative definitions of sex which helped clarify gender as “a relational social construct ... and sex as a highly deterministic concept deriving from the biological sciences” (ibid., p. 48). Eradication of the patriarchal language in schools and in textbooks and equal representation in school subjects and in educational professions were some of the demands during this period. Since boys and girls were socialised into different roles, gender inequalities could be reduced through non-sexist upbringing. Such ideas are based on biological differences since the sex roles are defined according to male/female differences and completely neglect structural and institutional factors (Pilcher, 2001).

For the second-wave theorists, gender identity is formed and learned by children from family, school, peers, and media. According to social constructivist analyses, individuals are not, however, passive imitators or recipients of socialisation. The social surroundings have expectations and help shape gender identities but at the same time contradictions and changes persistently influence behaviours. Gender is “constructed and reconstructed, contextualised and recontextualised ... [with] its own historical dynamic ... [as well as] contemporary transformation” (Arnot & Mac an Ghaill 2006, p. 10).

The post-structuralists of the third-wave feminism from the 1990s and onwards “pay attention to discourse ...[and] the process of deconstructing male/female dualism” (Davies, 1994, p. 2456) and are concerned with identity formation (Dillabough,

2006a). They challenge the category sex/gender and regard the concept of gender as a construction itself. Gender is not a set of roles that can be played voluntarily, a choice or “a construction that one puts on, as one puts on clothes in the morning” (Butler, 1993, cited in Bourdieu, 2006). The constitutive force of language in shaping gender inequalities, in particular the “gendered nature of educational language” (Dillabough, 2006b) is highlighted by post-structuralism.

Although presenting great differences, the feminist theories are greatly interwoven. They are not static but continuously being reconstructed and are in an incessant state of transformation. Although liberal feminism with its reliance on the state’s power to change the legal system to increase gender equality is discounted by the current feminists, the role of the state can be, and has been, of great importance (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). When the legal system secures political, social and economic rights for women, the gender equality of a society is enhanced, particularly when combined with women’s active participation in education, work outside home, and in political decision-making. Many countries in the world still deny women basic legal rights such as the right to own land or property, to conduct business, to inherit, to run for office or even to travel without male escort (ibid.).

It is remarkable that overviews of gender theories generally lack analyses of gender issues in Third World countries. Gender theories tend to neglect and exclude realities beyond what is experienced by women in the West. This was acknowledged at times by for example Davies (1994) who classified feminism as “owned and propagated by white middle-class women” ( p. 2456). This in turn seems to have paved the way for woman researchers from other ethnic groups (for example the black feminist movement in the US (Weiner, 2006). Still, however, the issues researched (with some exceptions regarding female education) are to a large extent limited to Western women’s experience. Also the world systems theory has “totally ignored the vital role women play in the economies of Third World countries” (Saltzman Chafetz, 1999, p. 9) in the description of the relationships between rich, core nations and poor, peripheral ones. Generally, colonial and global capitalism has increased gender inequalities in poor countries. Foreign trade distorts women’s traditional handicraft, small-scale trade and subsistent agriculture production. Young and unmarried women are exploited in factories owned by transnational corporations (TNCs). New economic, political and educational opportunities favour men as a result of the “local patriarchal relations [created together with] androcentric capitalist bias” (ibid. p. 9).

That women in developed industrialised countries generally have a less subjugated position than women in poor countries easily leads to the conclusion that economic development and growth are the key solutions to all problems for women in the South. Their illiteracy and poverty, low pay, heavy responsibility for children and family and their exclusion from participation and representation in the political system are all believed to be an effect of their countries’ low degree of development. However, a quick glance at countries such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar show how

erroneous this idea is. In terms of GDP these countries are as rich as the Scandinavian countries but women there do not even have the right to vote. In Saudi Arabia it is illegal for women to drive a car. Obviously, gender equality is by no means generated by economic growth alone. It is an issue of much greater complexity (Inglehart & Norris, 2003).

## Gender in Islam

Family relations and the closely related issues of gender roles and relations have always been important in Muslim societies. The family is the fundamental unit of society. The family's role is central in raising and educating children. A common interpretation of women's and men's roles in society is, in short, that the man's duty is to support the family while the woman's responsibility is for the household and the children's upbringing.

References to the Quran and the *hadiths* are used when describing the rights and duties of women and men in the society at large and in the family, including men's and women's roles and codes of conduct. These references are used to justify arguments regardless of the standpoints from which the explanation sets out. This is possible since Islam is not as monolithic a religion as many believe. As a world religion, it has during the course of history incorporated diverse cultures from many different regions. What has persisted almost everywhere are norms regarding gender roles "that are not necessarily theologically sanctioned by Islam in its authentic sense but yet through encrustations of tradition have become theologically confused with it" (Lulat, 2006, p. 526).

In addition to the actual Islamic sources, the Quran and the *hadiths*, three things in particular seem to have influenced the norms, which guide gender relations in Islam. These are the pre-Islamic values, the predominantly male interpretation of the Islamic sources and cultural influence on the interpretations. When Islam appeared in history society was characterised by well established and centuries-old conditions such as kinship structures and control of female sexuality. Some of these conditions although contradictory to the general spirit of the Quran, continued to prevail among many social groups (Arkoun, 1994). An individual's security was closely linked to the power of the clan. A woman would marry into another clan and the marriage contract might cement an alliance and increase the power of one or both clans. Thus, the control of female sexuality was imperative (ibid.). Males had a paramount position in society and a woman was regarded as little more than a possession. Men's right to marry and divorce at will was unlimited. Women had no inheritance rights whatsoever (Esposito, 1998).

All three major religions Judaism, Christianity and Islam, emerged in the same area and all have been characterised by a gender hierarchy with women subjugated to



social control and isolated from men. These religions also shared a code of honour, which depended on the female behaviour in the first hand. Colonialism and Christian mission also frequently reinforced the gender hierarchy (Okkenhaug & Flaskerud, 2005).

Until recently only men interpreted the sources of Islam, a fact that has implied a male perspective on human relations. During the 10th century, the development of Islamic Law declined. The rules that govern gender relations and human conduct in Muslim societies today primarily mirror the culture, ideas and perceptions of the Muslim community of that time (Roald, 2005). The male precedence in interpretation is “a direct contradiction to the first and foremost important principle of Islam, the Oneness of the Deity as the basis of all value and knowledge” (Lulat, 2006, p. 526.). The concept of *tawhid* (oneness) means that “God is one and unique, humanity is one”. Men and women are equal, have the same value, equal rights and duties and have the same accountability on the Day of Judgement (Yamani, 2007).

What is cultural and what is Islamic practice is an ongoing discussion, in particular with regards to practises with gender connotations. Roald (2001) argues that the historical development of Islamic law indicates that interpretations of social issues as they appear in the Quran and in the *hadiths* “are the result of dynamic interactions between Islamic scholars and society” (p. viii). The various collections of *hadiths* are ranked according to authenticity. Different schools have different views as to which collection is the most genuine and comprehensive. Islamic scholars have used different criteria in judging the authenticity, which is most likely due to the cultural influences of the social environment of the particular scholar (ibid.).

## Interpretations of Islamic sources

The Quran plays an immense role in defining gender patterns and relations. This is remarkable considering that the roles of women and men are not elaborated upon “to such an extent as to propose only a single possibility for each gender (that is, women must fulfil this role, and *only* this role, while men must fulfil that role and only men *can* fulfil it)” (Wadud, 2007, p. 158).

Interpretations of social issues in Islamic sources fall between two poles. These can be broadly defined as the cultural patterns of patriarchy and equality (Roald, 2001). In most Muslim societies gender is shaped by and functions within a patriarchal society. Patriarchy is, as pointed out by Okkenhaug and Flaskerud (2005), a concept loaded with ideology and in addition, is somewhat problematic. The static and deterministic description of male dominance and female subordination with men as omnipotent and women as passive subjugated subjects is challenging since it does not see patriarchy as a social construction, open for transformation. The patriarchal attitudes are as common in Christian and Judaic scriptures as in the Quran but most Christians and Jews do not

pay attention to such mindsets since they are not compatible with contemporary norms of equality (ibid.).

At least four points of departure can be discerned when gender issues in Islam are discussed and Islamic sources are interpreted: traditional, contemporary Muslim or Islamic, Western, and Feminist (Western or Islamic feminism). Each of these has its own characteristics as well as variations. Most commonly heard are the opposing views represented by many Westerners, on the one side, and by many Muslims, on the other, which are described by Arkoun (1994) as “devastating banalities” (p. 60). The social order is a patriarchal order, in Western as well as in Muslim societies. Women are subordinate to male domination to a greater or lesser degree, manifested differently in different competition and subjected to sexual harassment and exploitation.

Traditional interpretations imply that there is a divinely ordered gender pattern, an argument, which primarily rests on the Quranic verse 4:34 (see below). Contemporary Muslims tend to build their interpretation of gender roles on biological differences and believe that women and men have the same rights but different responsibilities. It is ‘natural’ for women to stay at home and take care of children. The physiological nature of a man makes him more suitable as breadwinner and protector (Roald, 2001). They also base their argument on the actual situation in most societies: women have the main responsibility for housework and child rearing and men earn most of the money. Western standpoints stress the inequality of women in Muslim societies based on an ideological conviction. Men and women have the same human rights. That Muslims tend to observe the gap between theory and practice in Western countries and non-Muslims notice the gap between Islamic theory and practice is a phenomenon of “in-group/out-group” patterns (ibid. p. 144). This is when members within each group tend to judge other groups and people by their actions. They only see behaviours they dislike in other groups while they judge themselves by ideals and see only the preferred characteristics of their own group.

Feminist interpretations vary. The Western sisterhood movement in the 1970s and 1980s wavered between “cultural relativism” and “truth”. On the one side, the Western concept of autonomy cannot be applied on Muslim women since they are living a Muslim life. On the other hand, even if Muslim women do not understand they are oppressed, they are (Ramazanoglu, 1986, cited in Haw, 1998). Western feminists have described the difficult situation of the Muslim woman and have condemned veiling, female circumcision and Islamic law (Haw, 1998). Muslim feminists have searched for the causes of women’s oppression from Marxist, liberal and Islamic viewpoints<sup>29</sup>. For some of the latter this has implied a re-reading and re-interpretation of the Islamic sources, in other words, “forcing them [the entire traditional patriarchal-oriented Muslim *ulama*] to go back to the Quran” (Lulat, 2006, p. 526). Male Islamic scholars have also contributed to the debate from feminist points of departure. Already at the

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<sup>29</sup> Roald (2001) distinguishes between Muslim and Islamic feminists where the former is “a ‘cultural’ Muslim” who is concerned with feminist issues while the latter is concerned with Islamic issues.



end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Qasim Amin<sup>30</sup> wrote a book titled *The Liberation of Women*. In the 1970s, al-Turabi<sup>31</sup> contributed an entirely new interpretation of the Quranic verses, which deal with women's rights (Roald, 2005). He claims that the Quranic verses are directed to men, not to women, and imply restrictions for men in their relations with women (ibid.)<sup>32</sup>.

Muslim feminists have sought to find a foundation for an Islamic identity that does not include oppression of women. They have argued that Muslim women are engaged in other more serious conflicts than veiling. They stress the need for fighting alongside with men in the economic and political struggles in the often undemocratic countries where they live (Haw, 1998). Although generally agreeing that the cultural practices in Islamic countries are oppressive to women, they challenge the Western stereotypical image of oppression. They have attempted to find "a new Islam so that equality and liberation can be achieved ... by defining complementary but non-oppressive roles for both men and women" (ibid. p. 93).

Wadud (2007) declares that the Quran must be interpreted in the context in which it was revealed, from its grammatical composition (how it says what it says) and from its entire worldview. Her analysis restricts "the meaning of many issues to a particular subject, event, or context" (ibid. p. 158) when she interprets the functions for each gender. According to her, the only function that is exclusive to one gender is the childbearing function that women, and only women, have. All other functions can be executed by both men and women.

The social issues that have been in focus for both Western researchers and Islamic scholars as regards gender issues are first and foremost veiling and gender segregation. The sections below briefly discuss the Islamic dress code and the issues of family relations, marriage, divorce, and polygyny, which are all frequently debated within the field of gender. For each issue the traditionalist interpretation will be presented together with a contemporary analysis, often from an Islamist viewpoint.

## Islamic female dress

Islamic veiling<sup>33</sup> raises strong reactions in the West<sup>34</sup>. It is understood as a symbol for the oppression of women or as a symbol for radical Islamist stances. Some people

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<sup>30</sup> Qasim Amin (d. 1908) was from Egypt. He has been called the first feminist of the Muslim world (Roald, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> Hasan al-Turabi is an Islamist from Sudan. al-Ghazzali and al-Qaradawi are other Islamists who have advocated for women's rights.

<sup>32</sup> The Quranic verse 33:59 that tells that women should cover the body when going out means, according to al-Turabi, that women are in their full right to get out and are not restricted to stay at home (Roald, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> There is no clear definition of the veil. It may be a simple headscarf or a veil covering the whole face.

<sup>34</sup> Most Christian, Judaic, Druze and Muslim women in the Middle East used a similar veil or headscarf less than 100 years ago (Hjärpe, 2004). In Sweden, rural women used a headscarf and urban women commonly wore a hat, also indoors, when they were out of their own homes up to the 1950s.

react with anger and regard a Muslim woman who wears the veil voluntarily – or even worse, with pride – as a traitor to the struggle for women’s liberation. It may also awake resentment since it seems to signal a ‘holier than you’ attitude<sup>35</sup> (Roald, 2001).

There are two passages in the Quran that are understood as prescribing the need for a woman to cover with a veil, 24:31 and 33:59. The verses have been interpreted very differently. An extreme traditionalist interpretation says that no part of the female body should be seen by anyone outside the woman’s residency. Roald (2001) explains how the contemporary debate is taking place on several levels. Social researchers tend to analyse veiling in socio-political terms and provide an instrumental analysis. Women wear the veil because it gives them social and economic advantages. By veiling women gain respect and avoid sexual harassment. Muslim feminists have found that the veil is just an ancient custom. Islamic scholars, classical as well as contemporary, concentrate their discussion on whether veiling only includes covering the hair and most of the body or if face-veil, gloves and stockings are necessary. *Hadiths* have been referred to in order to justify one or another viewpoint. After examining all the recognised *hadith* collections as well as other books on and with *hadiths*, Roald (2001) found that only two *hadiths* provide instructions regarding women’s clothing and none of them are more specific than the ones in the Quran. The *hadith* literature is more concerned with male dress, and describes particularly how the Prophet and his companions were dressed (ibid.)<sup>36</sup>. One cannot but agree with Roald that it is “amazing how Islamic writers tend to concentrate on female dress” (p. 267).

Why is female dress such a burning issue? A common view among Muslims is that women must cover so as not to tempt men. Hjärpe (2004) has found that throughout history and regardless of religions, the female body has been eroticised to a much higher degree than have men’s bodies. Interestingly, as noted by Roald (2001), the above mentioned Quranic verse 33:59, explains that women should cover so as not to be affronted *by* men and not, as the general understanding is, be a temptation *to* men. Men, in turn, should “restrain their eyes and observe continence” when meeting unknown women (Quran verse 24:30, translated by Rodwell, 1994).

For many and maybe for the majority of Muslim women today wearing the veil or headscarf is a religious symbol and they wear it ‘because the Quran tells so’. For others, and the number seems to be on the increase, it is a symbol of resistance against Western dominance and culture. In the Occupied Palestinian Territories, for example, teenage girls and young women carefully cover their heads so as not to let one hair slip out and simultaneously, like their sisters in the West, wear extremely tight jeans and tops, with arms bare. To tempt men or to be molested by men seems to be a non-issue but as an Islamic symbol the veil is important.

<sup>35</sup> The veil of the Christian nun has none of the connotations the Islamic veil has. It is seen as a symbol of piety, purity and piece (Roald, 2001).

<sup>36</sup> Also men should be decently dressed according to Islam, i.e. preferably the entire body should be covered and a small skull-cap on the head is recommended (Hjärpe, 2004)

## Women and men

Many of the new regulations that were introduced by the Quran implied substantial reforms that positively affected the status of women. Customary practices were modified by Quranic regulations<sup>37</sup> (Esposito, 1998). The Quranic verse 4:34<sup>38</sup> is the classic, and singled out as the most important, verse with regards to gender relations. This verse has been interpreted as if men were created superior to women, something Wadud (2007) strongly opposes. She brings into evidence that the proper meaning of the verse is quite different. What has caused the controversy, and been debated for centuries, is the interpretation and translation of the term *qiwamah*. The discussion has dealt with whether men should 'have responsibility over women', 'take full care of women', 'protect women', 'be in charge of women' and/or 'control women'. Moreover, the reasons for men's guardianship have been discussed and also whether this relation applies to all men and all women. Contemporary interpretations often understand 'men's responsibility for women as bound to time and place. Changes in socio-economic conditions have changed the relationship (Roald, 2001). Wadud (2007) states that an interpretation that views men as superior is completely "unwarranted" because there is no passage anywhere that refers to male physical or intellectual capacity. In addition, such an interpretation is "inconsistent with other Islamic teachings" (p. 163). She also highlights that the verse tells that "[s]ome men excel over some women in some manners. Likewise, some women excel over some men in some manners". The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt has expressed similar ideas: "this [*qiwamah*] should not be understood as an absolute and general attitude in all things and for all men over all women" (The Muslim Brotherhood, 1994, quoted in Roald, 2001). Wadud (2007) concludes her discussion by applying this verse to the society at large, to men's responsibility for women as "child bearers". Since only women have this possibility and responsibility, it is the man's duty to physically protect her and materially sustain her.

Roald (2001) has explored in depth the Quran and the *hadith* literature concerning gender relations. She found two aspects of men's and women's relations: on the one hand a relationship of love and tenderness, of equal rights and obligations and on the other, male superiority, men's right to control women and women's duty

<sup>37</sup> For example, the dowry a bride gets from her husband would now be received by the woman as her own property and not given to her father. Women were granted inheritance (although not as much as men), a legal right Western women got only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Esposito, 1998).

<sup>38</sup> There are many translated versions of this verse. For example: "Men are protectors and maintainers of women, because God has given the one more strength than the other, and because they support them from their means" (Ali, 1998, cited in Roald, 2001). Or: "Men shall take full care of women with the bounties which God has bestowed more abundantly on the former than on the latter, and with what they may spend out of their possessions" (Asad, 1984, cited in Roald, 2001). A third version: "Men are superior to women on the account of the qualities with which God has gifted the one above the other, and on account of the outlay they make from their substance for them" (Rodwell, 1994)

to obey men. Contemporary Islamists claim that men and women are created from one single entity or soul<sup>39</sup> and complement each other. Men should, however, take the economic responsibility for their families. Some Islamists “reinterpret or reselect from the Islamic sources in order to find evidences that prevailing attitudes towards women are a wrong interpretation of the sources”, others try to “eliminate gender differences from the Islamic content” and emphasise the “spiritual equality between the sexes” (p. 157).

Marriage in Islam is not a sacrament instituted by God but a contractual agreement between two parties. Marriage is central in Islam and is incumbent on every man and woman unless physical or financial obstacles make it impossible. Traditionally, marriages were and still are in many Muslim countries not agreed upon by the bride and the groom but arranged by their respective families although the two partners must give their consent. As regards divorce, the practices and attitudes towards it are different among contemporary Muslim countries. According to the Quran it is a right only for men. Islamic scholars and Islamists tend to emphasise men’s responsibilities and women’s as well as men’s right to divorce (ibid.).

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Gender is a social construction, which implies that behaviours and practises performed by men and women are learned and reflected by the social order of the society. The social order is a patriarchal order, in Western as well as in Muslim societies. Women are subordinate to male domination to a greater or lesser degree, manifested differently in different societies, but essentially the same. Girls and women internalise and find natural and normal the gendered social order they experience and are taught by parents, teachers and others in their surroundings. The understanding of male domination of women is often in the unconscious mind of people and therefore not easily amenable to change. However, in no society, not even the most patriarchal, is women’s subordination static and deterministic. It is constantly transforming because gender relations are socially constructed (Okkenhaug & Flakerud, 2005).

Regarding gender issues in Islam, it can be mentioned that Al-Turabi and many other Islamic scholars as well as Muslim feminists emphasise that Islam has been influenced by different cultures throughout history. This is seen as a positive feature of the religion and an encouraging sign in today’s discussion of gender relations (Roald, 2005). Local traditions have historically been incorporated within the structure and constitution of Islam and likewise, so have ‘new’ ideas of gender equality, which many contemporary Islamists believe is inherent in Islam and not at all ‘new’.

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<sup>39</sup> “O, people! Be conscious of your Lord, who created you from a single being and created its mate of the same, and from these two spread many men and women” (Quranic verse 4:1, cited in Hofmann, 1993).



## Chapter Six

# Globalisation

The word globalisation emerged in the English language some 400 years ago but did not come into more general use until the 1960s and then it was used mainly in economic contexts (Featherstone, 2002). When Marshall McLuhan (1964) coined the term ‘the global village’, globalisation got significance also outside the economic domain and thereby gained a more widespread use. The word’s inclusion in everyday language was an event of the 1990s (Featherstone, 2002). Today it has a common but loose use and it has become a part of almost all major world languages (Scholte, 2000).

This chapter begins with a general overview of globalisation, where the phenomenon is first defined and explained and continues with a short review of globalisation from economic, political, cultural and social perspectives. The next part of the chapter discusses Islam and globalisation followed by a section on gender and globalisation. The final and largest section addresses education and globalisation.

### A general overview

Internationalisation, i.e. increasing interaction and interdependence between people, organisations or nation-states, is in daily language commonly believed to have the same meaning as globalisation (Scholte, 2000; Daun, 2003). However, globalisation exists regardless of borders and has above all, has economic, political, social, cultural and educational implications. Globalisation, it is argued, is the final stage of capitalism, or of global market fundamentalism, and has caused the retreat of the state, as well as the demise of traditional values and culture (e.g. Scholte, 2000; Stromquist & Monkman, 2000; Waters, 2000; Stromquist, 2002; Daun, 2003; Karlsson & Mansory, 2004; Gardell, 2005; Daun, 2006). It is claimed that globalisation is equal to Americanisation, westernisation or modernisation that is, to processes understood as being spread world-wide via US-led capitalism, industrialisation and dissemination of values such as rationalism, secularism, and individualism (Stromquist, 2002). Other arguments assert that globalisation entails a new world order with increasing wealth, democracy and human rights, expanding availability of and extensive access to information and knowledge (Wolf, 2001). Technological innovations (for example, IT and mobile phones) have made it possible for individuals all over the world to communicate. Globalisation pulls together popular movements such as Civil Society Groups (CSOs) working for the environment, debt forgiveness, fair trade, human rights, etc. (Stromquist, 2002). Moreover, religious movements are “on the rise almost everywhere” (Berger, 1999 p.

6). This is particularly true in the case of the Islamic upsurge with its vast geographical scope from North Africa to South-East Asia and the Evangelical expansion especially in Latin America (*ibid.*).

Several clear-cut definitions of globalisation exist. The one offered by Gibson-Graham (1996, cited in Stromquist & Monkman, 2000) summarises globalisation as “a set of processes by which the world is rapidly being integrated into one economic space via increased international trade, the internationalisation of production and financial markets, the internationalisation of commodity culture promoted by an increasingly networked global telecommunications system” (p. 4).

Several explanations of globalisation also exist. According to the world system theories, the world consists of connected and interdependent elements such as nations, companies, organisations, etc. These theories seek to explain the dynamics of the capitalist world economy as a total social system. Immanuel Wallerstein, once a professor of Columbia University, was the first to elaborate the theory in the 1970s. According to him

a world system is a social system, one that has boundaries, structures, member groups, rules of legitimation and coherence. Its life is made up of conflicting forces, which hold it together by tension and tear it apart as each group seeks eternally to remold it to its advantage (Wallerstein, 1976, p. 229).

The market integrates the interdependent regions into a world economy, regions, which are hierarchically related but lack a central political mechanism (*ibid.*).

The adherents to the world system theory from a sociological perspective, the institutionalists, claim the existence of a world polity, which is “not a physical body or institution but a complex of cultural expectations” (Daun, 2006, p. 9). It is a cultural construction, disseminated throughout the world from the Western countries and international organisations. The world polity prescribes how organisations should implement ideas and principles in the “world society” (Lechner & Boli, 2001). The world polity provides cultural rules or recipes that instruct institutions around the world as to how they should deal with common problems or phenomena, for example with an educational system.

World models are components of the world polity and include the predominant discourses, which in turn include the market ideology and consumer culture. One of the key models is the one that stipulates the function of the state. World models inform governments, organisations, and individuals as to what to think and do. An important means for disseminating elements of the world model from the North to the South is development cooperation, evident in, for example, the field of education.

Sklair (2001) brings the world system theory further by adding an analysis of the roles of transnational corporations, political parties and the consumerist ideology. According to her view: TCNs strive to control global capital, resources and markets; the transnational capitalist classes seek control of global power and rule through capitalist

political parties or the social democrats; and, the “transnational agents and institutions of the culture-ideology of consumerism strive to control the realm of ideas” (Sklair, 2001, p. 69). Stromquist (2002), in examining TNCs sees “the connection between economic power and political influence and, in this new power the ability to shape education and culture” (p. 83).

Stromquist (2002) identifies international lending institutions and development assistance agencies as “carriers of globalization”, a role clearly visible in many Third World countries, not least in Afghanistan. The links, actions and processes between the components of the world system, i.e. between the states, the transnational companies and the international organisations, have become more and more extensive over the past decades. According to Daun (2006), it is these flows or processes that can be defined as globalisation.

Globalisation can be discussed from different perspectives: economic, political, cultural, social and educational. *Economically*, globalisation entails neoliberalist policies and international economic processes, including modes of production, patterns of consumption and international trade. It entails, as defined by IMF, “the growing economic interdependence of countries worldwide through the increasing volume and variety of cross-boarder transactions in goods and services and of international capital flows, and also through the more rapid and widespread diffusion of technology” (cited in Wolf, 2001, p. 9). The capitalist system forces or persuades people to become more competitive and to act as producers or consumers in a monetised and commodified arena (Daun, 2006). Increasing economic growth is a dominant feature and is mainly experienced in industrialised countries. Other countries, like the majority of nations in Africa, Latin America and Asia are marginalised in the world economy and in international trade. For some countries or regions as well as for many individuals the competition inevitably leads to marginalisation. Growth and wealth are concentrated in certain geographical zones in Europe and North America, in some areas in East and Southeast Asia, Oceania and Latin America. Transnational corporations are prime agents as well as major beneficiaries of economic globalisation: already by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century around 400 TNCs own more than two-thirds of the world’s fixed assets and control some 70 per cent of world trade (Stromquist & Monkman, 2000). TNCs are interested in non-risk commercial investments, have no humanitarian or human rights objectives and are not present in the world’s poorest countries. (There are also evolutionists who like the liberal economists in general optimistically view economic globalisation as something that in the long run will benefit all people in the world and consider the social costs as unfortunate but inevitable (Featherstone, 2000).

Movements around the world call for a restructuring of globalisation or for a globalisation from below, demanding a fair distribution of wealth and opportunities. Environmental groups sometimes claim that “wealth reduction” in the North is indispensable to attain “poverty reduction” in the South. Civil society groups have succeeded, to some extent, in putting various political and social injustice issues, as



well as the effects of the “free” trade, and other such concerns on the global agenda.

*Politically*, globalisation implies “decision-making and action by a number of actors in a globalised space, more or less beyond the full control of state governments” (Hettne, 2002, p. 7). Nation-states have to a large extent surrendered their sovereignty to larger political units like the European Union and international organisations like United Nations (UN) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Rust and Jacob, 2005). Globalisation has brought about a changed role for the nation-state. It has moved from its previous regulating, financing and educating role, i.e. a pro-active function, to a more retroactive role as a consequence of the restructuring in accordance to the world model. The state engages more in supervision, monitoring and evaluation, and leaves, or is forced to leave, the responsibility for a number of social activities to the private sector, to NGOs or to lower levels of the state hierarchy. The state has got a new role as mediator between the global and the national/local (Daun, et al., 2004), i.e. between supranational bodies like the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and Civil Society Organisations, including NGOs. In Afghanistan, the government and president are attempting to ‘mediate’ between the big donors and lending institutions, on whom they are highly dependent, and the national delegations who represent local and traditional institutions who insistently make their demands known.

‘Governance’ has become a new buzzword among policy-makers, researchers and actors in development cooperation. The ‘New Governance’ has been summarised by Daun (2006) as an increase in transnational regulations, hybridisation (mix) of national regulations and fragmentation of local regulations. These patterns are mainly applied in the North while countries in the South, who lack resources and capabilities are nevertheless compelled to adhere to this model of governance (Stromquist & Monkman, 2000; Daun, 2006).

Meyer et al. (2001) have described how the world model has shaped all nation-states into similar identities, structures and behaviour, and how states have become more isomorphic and change more uniformly than ever before. The model of “rationalized modernity is a universalistic and inordinately successful form of the earlier Western religious and post-religious system” (p. 91). “The salvation” can now be found outside the church, i.e. “in rationalized structures grounded in scientific and technical knowledge ... The new religious elites are the professionals, researchers, scientists and intellectuals ... along with managers, legislators and policymakers” (p. 91). Journalists and consultants could be added to this list. Together they produce secularised and universalistic accounts of the world and of the nation-states’ role in the world. However, Meyer et al. also foresee a world changing in another direction as all the social problems caused by globalisation eventually “evoke world-societal reactions seeking to put things right” (p. 92).

As described by Daun (2003), the liberal form of democracy is spreading all over the world and “free” elections have been held in numerous countries, including

in the Third World, during the past decades whether or not a multiparty system exists<sup>40</sup>. On the one hand, it is argued that this “market-oriented view of democracy is elite competition for votes” (ibid. p. 21) and on the other hand, it is argued that democracy brings the opportunity for everyone to participate in the development of society. In the case of Afghanistan new forms of popular participation have been imposed from outside while traditional councils have often been disregarded.

Another issue in the contemporary world is whether globalisation brings peace, security and stability or conflict, uncertainty and disorder. The widening gap between rich and poor countries has not (yet?) resulted in violent confrontation. Only rarely in the past decades have border conflicts or other disputed issues between neighbouring countries resulted in violent reactions (Ogata, 2001). Instead, there are more internal conflicts between different groups (although often triggered or fomented by external interests), sometimes described or camouflaged as ethnic or religious conflicts. On a global scale, though, the USA is fighting a “war on terror”, with a current concentration in Iraq and Afghanistan.

*Culturally*, globalisation entails new forms of media, technology and communication, rapid scientific advances, global tourism, and a swiftly expanding commodity culture. It also brings revitalisation of indigenous cultures, desecularisation and political responses from grassroots organisations. The mass media owned by global media companies<sup>41</sup> play a significant role in spreading a homogenised culture through consumer brands, films and music and particularly through television. A consumption-based culture is thus being transmitted at an increasingly rapid pace and even reaching distant localities and illiterate people.

In 2001 Afghanistan had only one national TV channel but in 2007 there were seven. Most of the broadcasting time was spent on imported soap operas and advertisements. Advertisements contribute to spreading the value systems of capitalist cultures. “The economization of culture has resulted in a form of cultural imperialism, less imposed by political power, but permeated and reinforced by economic power” (Oliver, 2005). Consumption (particularly in the North) seems to be a substitute for people’s participation in societal affairs, politics or cultural activities.

The commodification of culture is most powerful through the electronic mass media. The rapid development of Internet Technologies (IT) has reached the entire world. IT connects people around the globe and information is spread rapidly; however, what is accessible is still limited and mainly determined by the North. English, the mother tongue of the world’s superpower has become the ruling world language and dominates communication, business, science, media, popular culture, politics, and electronic communication.

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<sup>40</sup> When people voted in the parliamentary elections in Afghanistan in 2005 they choose between more than 3000 individual candidates.

<sup>41</sup> “[T]he global media resides in the hands of nine mutually emulating corporations with very little government monitoring” (Stromquist, 2002. p 178).

The market discourse has implied commodification of social relations too. Family bonds are getting lax and the individual takes precedence over the collectivity. Basically positive, individualism has perverted and transformed into “I-ification” with self-realisation and self-assertion as guiding principles (Bjereld & Demker, 2005). To invest in oneself is an accepted norm in many societies while collectivist oriented values have lost significance. The present doctrine is not ‘I think therefore I am’ but instead ‘I am I’ (Bauman, 1999, cited in Arnot and Mac an Ghaill, 2006).

Many Muslims are not attracted by many of the features of globalisation such as individualism, purposive rationality, commodification of life and relations, and secularisation of education. Thus they feel they have to defend their value systems (Daun, et al., 2004). Other individuals and groups around the world actively respond to the standardised consumer culture. They resist globalisation by “asserting cultural values that may themselves be global” (Carnoy, 2002, p. xvii), such as environmentalism and feminism. Internet technology allows people and organisations to get in touch with each other, and state control over the information provided through IT has largely proven ineffective. The interest in local and traditional cultures has been stimulated and a revival of moral and values education has occurred in many countries, particularly in Asia (Cummings et al., 2001). In the Muslim areas of the Philippines integrated *madrasas* have been initiated outside the public education system: “In a social climate plagued by drug smuggling, kidnapping ... armed insurgency, there is a widespread assumption that only Islam can offer an ethical system ... to counter” such activities (Milligan, 2006, p. 417).

The assumption that secularisation is a faithful ally to modernisation has, according to Berger (1999), proven false. The world today “is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever” (ibid. p. 2), a claim demonstrated, for example, by the rise of political Islam in its many different shapes (see next section). In Muslim countries Islamist movements have been strengthened and have extended into new areas. Islamist movements utilise mass media and IT and reach large parts of the globe and Muslim migrants actively spread Islamic messages. The established Christian churches have lost adherents in the West but Christian “free” movements, such as the Pentecostals, have gained new followers in new countries, for example in China and in Latin America (ibid.). In the United States it is obvious that the separation of religion and state (and education) and a secular constitution have not weakened individuals’ preferences for religious matters (Pohl, 2006). Globalisation has brought competition between religions and ideologies. This is evident, for example, in Afghanistan, which is currently densely populated by aid organisations representing various creeds including Western “secular”, Christian as well as Islamic, albeit only a small number of Islamic organisations are represented.

The global discourse on rights issues (human rights, women’s and children’s rights, rights of minorities, disabled etc.) has become part of the world model. All states are compelled to accept these notions as universal and few voices are raised to

question them. However, for many people in the South they represent individualistic values alien to their collectivist cultures. On the other hand, acceptance of these standards has implied enhanced opportunities for girls' and women's education as well as a more inclusive practices for people with disabilities.

## Islam and Globalisation

The role of Islam in globalisation can be viewed from different angles. The assumption that the superiority of Western economy and technology, which, through globalisation, will bring the dominance to Western values, beliefs and norms<sup>42</sup> and subsequent submission of Islam and its adherents, is as greatly trusted as it is feared. The statement that the pre-eminence of Islam, based on its glorious past as well as on the supremacy of spiritualism as opposed to materialism and consumerism, and its continuous spread, is advocated with self-assertion or feared as a 'green peril' that is threatening the world<sup>43</sup>. The perspective varies depending on whose views are expressed. Islam is feared since it has a political and not only a religious agenda and is therefore repeatedly accused of being inferior and incompatible with democratic values.

After 9/11 millions of Muslims around the world faced a difficult and humiliating situation since Muslims were categorised under one umbrella only: as terrorists. The fact that the hijackers were Muslims made every Muslim guilty by association (Ahmed, 2003). Millions of Muslims live in the West, the majority in Europe but also in North America, as newly arrived refugees or as second and third generation immigrants who have adopted different strategies for survival in societies that to a large extent are hostile to their existence. Islam is becoming very visible in Europe "bringing about a restoration, not only of Islamic beliefs but of distinctively Islamic life-styles, which in many ways contradict modern ideas" (Berger, 1999, p. 7). However, Islamic revival is not limited to underprivileged or backwards sectors of society but is embraced "particularly" by "people with Western-style higher education" (ibid., p. 8) and is also, as the case of the revivalist movement in Indonesia shows, sometimes a strong advocate for Western type of democracy and a pluralist political system. On a global scale, Islam is gaining more new adherents than any other religion, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (ibid.).

<sup>42</sup> Through his essay "End of History" Francis Fukuyama became world famous by claiming that we have reached the end point of mankind's ideological evolution since we have now witnessed "the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government .... triumph of the West, of the Western idea ... an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism" (Fukuyama, 1989).

<sup>43</sup> Islam is "a cancer spreading around the world, undermining the legitimacy of Western values" (Hadar, cited in Yom, 2002).

Islam is met not only with resentment but also with a growing interest by Westerners. Conversion to Islam occurs on a limited scale.

Starting with the period of Enlightenment, rationalism and secularism moved religion and religious practices into the private sphere. The awakened interest in values and the return of religion into the political arena in the North, in political party life as well as in politicians' rhetoric, is basically due to moral and values crisis in high income societies but can additionally be seen as an indirect effect of 'globalising Islam'. Roy (2004) defines globalised Islam as "the way in which the relationship of Muslims to Islam is reshaped by globalisation, westernisation and the impact of living as a minority" (p. ix). However, a more dialectic view includes Islam as a critical factor of globalisation, which is not only reshaped by but is also contributing to reshaping globalisation itself (Yom, 2002).

Already a millennium or more ago Islam was a globalising power with its peak during the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was guided by such scholars such as Ibn Arabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Al-Beruni, Al-Ghazzali, and Rumi just to mention a few of the most famous scientists and poets. Subsequent European scholars like Aquinas, Dante and Cervantes were all indebted to their Islamic predecessors. Up to the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries Islamic globalisation was seen as transmitting "an irresistible global culture" (Ahmed, 2003, p. 27). "Muslims certainly had no reasons to feel downhearted about their ability to compete, in either divine or human terms; in "globalisation" they were fully competitive" (Simons, 2003, p 2).

The Western civilisation, which now dominates the world through globalisation, holds a powerful weapon in the media, especially television. The media stereotypes Muslims as fanatic terrorists, medieval reactionaries and/or women oppressors. "Nothing in the history has threatened Muslims like the Western media; neither gunpowder in the Middle Ages ... nor trains and the telephone, which helped colonise them ... The Western mass media are ever present and ubiquitous; never resting and never allowing respite" (Ahmed, 1992, p. 223). The Western stereotype in Muslim minds is likewise hostile: it is an evil demon, attempting to subvert Muslim societies and control their resources, an idea sometimes heard also in Afghanistan. There, antipathy has regrettably, for both sides, somehow replaced the previously famous hospitality towards foreigners. This aversion is nurtured by films shown on television as well as by the life-styles demonstrated by the Western expatriates. However, the battle between the "phobias" is uneven. The rising tide of islamophobia allows almost any aggression against Muslims, physical or mental, and is executed by governments and church representatives as well as media and schools (Ahmed, 2003). Civilians being killed, random detention without trials, denial of Islam as religion, publishing of ridiculing cartoons and exclusion of school girls wearing the veil are just a handful of the thousands of actions against Muslims in the West. (Some of the Muslim leaders have taken the opportunity too to detain "non-desired elements" within their own countries, for instance in Pakistan and Egypt). Islamophobia is not only confined to

the West, but it has less impact in other countries. For example, in India there have been numerous incidents of hostility against Muslims and prejudice against Muslims is prevalent in Latin America as well as in Christian Africa.

The technological advances, in particular Internet, allow Muslims “to participate in the imagined community of the ummah, to build or re-imagine a virtual ummah which nets together Muslims and also acts as a platform for Islamic ideas on the global stage” (Featherstone, 2002). In addition, Internet contributes to “de-monopolising” knowledge, making Islam and its sources available for everyone, which makes it possible for individual reflections and for new readers to get acquainted with Islam (ibid.). Since Muslim countries gained their independence from the colonial powers several international organisations have advocated Islamic ideas and values. These include, for example, UNESCO’s counterpart The Islamic Organisation for Education, Science and Culture (ISESCO) as well as Arabic and Muslim NGOs, which support educational activities in African, Asian as well as European countries (Daun, et al., 2004).

Commodification has also hit Islam. Islam is a commodity “for sale” on the global market. TV-programmes, web sites, video tapes, as well as an enormous production of literature, scientific as well as popular, Arabic language courses and artefacts like turbans, rosaries, shawls are all marketed. “Such commodities are examples of the Islamization of modernity, as well as the fact that these new technologies facilitate the globalization of Islam” (Ouis, 2001, p. 179).

## The Islamist revival

The Islamist revival has strong anti-American and anti-Western underpinnings but Islamists in general favour modernisation as a means to development. They prefer improved material conditions without Westernisation and Western hegemony. Mass media and technologies are not bad *per se* (Ouis, 2001). Muslims, particularly those living in the Gulf states and in the West, have responded in two ways to the modernisation embedded in globalisation, either by adopting fully the Western, consumerist lifestyle (as ideal models they are called by Ouis ‘McMuslims’) or by totally rejecting the same. She concludes: “The two extreme solutions do not seem to be realistic or fruitful in practice ... There must be third, alternative route for mainstream Muslims...Islam is supposed to be a middle way; a moderate, balanced way of life...” (p. 184).

According to Monshipuri (2002) Islamic revival is a response to the failure of the secular and modern states to support and protect their people, both materially and culturally. The resistance is not only about gaining political power, but is strongly concerned with the durability of Islamic beliefs and ethical values in a globalising society (ibid.). Monshipuri (2002) identifies responses to globalisation from three different groups in the Muslim world: a) the conservatives or localizers;



b) the modernists or semi-integrationists; and, c) the liberals, the globalizers. The conservatives (orthodox or extremist) are especially distrustful of globalisation and oppose all Western ideas, practices and institutions, which are seen as secular and a cultural invasion. They favour an Islamic state built on Shariah. They are ‘localizers’ since they promote authentic Islamic beliefs, values and traditions. In Afghanistan, the Taliban’s attempt to encapsulate the entire country is an example of ‘localising’. The modernists claim that a match between modernisation and Islam is possible and desirable; indeed, it is fully coherent with Islamic tradition. They argue for democratic accountability and respect for social justice and a society based on collective and communitarian norms. The Afghan Islamists who belonged to this group were the core of the resistance against the Soviet occupation but are currently practically silenced. Islamic liberals (or revisionists) think, according to Monshipuri, that the values associated with the Western civilisation, liberty, equality and fraternity, are “universalizable”. They call for submission to these values and believe that Muslims should actively participate to improve a universal civilisation. Adherents to this group have recently appeared in Afghanistan.

Roy (2004) discusses how globalisation has pushed the Islamist movements in the South into two alternatives: either to take on a neo-fundamentalist direction or to develop into clear-cut political parties within the nation-states. The latter now seems to be taking precedence in many countries, for example in Turkey, Palestine, Algeria and Tunisia. Islamic movements are increasingly becoming parliamentary parties, advocating elections, democracy and a civil society (ibid.). Also in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist parties are working actively with non-violent methods demanding democratic reforms, civil rights and social justice (Gardell, 2005). Two of the biggest Islamic NGOs<sup>44</sup> in Indonesia, with more than 50 million members, represent an inclusive and tolerant Islam committed to democratic reforms and participation within the political process (Pohl, 2006). All over the Muslim world, Islamic NGOs are being established in city slums and in poor rural communities and run social and economic programs to support and protect the inhabitants (ibid.). In many parts of the world, Muslims are increasingly calling for reform of parts of the Shariah laws that are seen as incompatible with modern Islamic thought (Monshipuri, 2002).

Neofundamentalism has found more supporters outside the Muslim world, such as among the uprooted Muslim youth in the West, particularly in the second and third generation Muslims. They experience a “de-territorialisation of Islam” and are more interested in Islamic norms and morals than of creating an Islamic state (Roy, 2004). In addition, mullahs in poor Muslim countries (like Afghanistan) with little educational background are often proponents of this trend.

Thus, globalised Islam has many faces: from the rootless Muslims in Western Europe seeking to maintain a global *umma* to the pragmatic Islamist parties who

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<sup>44</sup> The Indonesian Society for Pesantren and Community Development and The Institute for Islamic and Social Studies (Pohl, 2006).

participate in parliamentary elections and from those claiming a private, individual faith to the neo-fundamentalists propagating for implementation of Shariah. Whatever faction or feature, Islam is a strong factor in the globalisation process.

## Gender and globalisation

Women have been affected positively as well as negatively by globalisation. The global pressure for girls' education has implied that girls attend school to a much higher degree today than some decades ago although they still are far from parity with boys in many countries. The global pressure for girls' enrolment and, in particular, retention after primary level may imply a clash with cultural norms, a conflict that is particularly visible in Afghanistan. Women around the world are increasingly claiming economic independence and in most countries they are increasingly incorporated into the labour force. Principles of equal opportunities for men and women in education, work, political and social life are spread worldwide. International and grassroots' organisations as well as the UN, OECD and the European Union (EU) have through conferences, studies and research promoted women's equality. Examples include the world conferences on women in Nairobi, Copenhagen and Beijing and the UN Platform for Action. Although few of the commitments made by the states have been respected, awareness of gender issues has increased (Sutherland, 2005).

In the debate on globalisation, gender is remarkably absent. As is pointed out by Blackmore (2000), although "[e]conomic globalization has imparted primacy to a market that is not gender-neutral" it may actually "reassert a new fundamentalism in gender relations" (p. 151). "The intrusion of the world-system through foreign investment and trade dependence on core nations has operated to reduce women's status relative to men's" (Ward, cited in Stromquist, 2002, p 137). The global economic mechanisms – liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation – have a greater effect on women than men, particularly on poor women in Third World Countries. For instance, cutting state social welfare expenditures in areas such as health and education place a heavier burden on women.

In many countries women migrate to cities and become street vendors or factory workers. All Asian countries with manufacturing industries rely on female labour, many of whom work in export-processing zones (EPZs) working for TNCs at the mercy of agents and with salaries way below minimum wage and below the levels of men (ibid.). They are exploited but still "working in a different setting, outside the home, and earning an income, however small, becomes a source of change for women as new social spaces and less financial dependency on men widen one's self-esteem and mental horizon" (ibid. p. 140).

According to Stromquist (2002), the spread of the Internet has had a mostly



positive impact on women and women's movements. Also mass media, in particular television, may contribute to change as new roles for women as professionals and for men as performers of domestic activities are presented. However, and more commonly, media tends to present sexualised and erotic views of women. Sexual exploitation of women, human trafficking and prostitution are phenomena to which Internet, mass media and the new migration processes contribute, which, to say the least, have had extremely negative impacts on women.

The global expansion of education has to a large extent benefited girls and women, which will be further elaborated upon in the next section.

## Education and globalisation

Education is heavily involved in the globalisation process, resulting in changes in educational systems, structures and content. Globalisation has changed the notion of education as a public responsibility and a public good and has, particularly in the North, moved educational systems from the state monopoly into the marketplace. Particularly in higher education globalisation has altered "the fields of study according to the needs of the market, increasingly substituting ...the traditional search for truth" (Stromquist 2002, p. 41).

The world model in education, spread within the North and from North to South, and the market ideology penetrate the aims of education, the state role, financing, content, teaching methods, teacher training, measuring of outcomes, educational structures and organisation, and the view of students and teachers (e.g. Burbules & Torres, 2000; Carnoy, 2000; Stromquist, 2002; Daun, 2006). The currently popular policy "buzz words [are] privatisation, choice and decentralisation..." (Burbules & Torres, 2000, p. 18). Not all researchers in education agree that globalisation leads to a "world culture" in education. Steiner-Khamsi (2004) does not question the existence of globalisation processes but does not see an emerging model of education as a result of these processes. A common world model of education is imagined and there are local adaptations and modifications to globalisation in education. She continues: "[T]here may be greater convergence among the voices of policy analysts and researchers justifying their models, than among the educational reforms themselves" (p. 5). Writers on globalisation (journalists as well as researchers) sometimes take their own Western reality as norm, for example lauding the 'global' benefits of Internet but which is actually available for only six per cent of the global population (Tilly, 2004). However it is also true that globalisation penetrates not only the "centres of influence" but also the "edges" of the world. Global influence *is* experienced in schools in distant villages – even in Afghanistan (see chapter 12) and is not "highly selective" (ibid. p. 20).

Successfully, multilateral organisations such as UN organisations and the World

Bank, and non-governmental organisations have funded and disseminated particular approaches to education. This started with the elaboration of “development assistance programs” at the Jomtien conference of 1990, which declared Education for All by the year 2000 and the Millennium Development Goals of 2000 to be attained by the year 2015 (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Since 2002, the Fast-Track Initiative, “an unprecedented exercise in transferring reform models from one context to another” (ibid, p. 170) launched by a small group of G-8 countries, is being implemented in 18 selected low-income countries. These models, the “best practices”, agreed upon internationally but developed without considering local contexts, are likely to advance as models “exclusively for low-income countries” (ibid, p. 170).

## The influence of market ideologies on education

Not long ago, education was considered a common good, a right for every human being and financing was a shared responsibility. Now education tends to become a profit-making enterprise, a commodity that is sold and bought on the market. Even in such an extremely poor country as Afghanistan private schools have emerged and TV channels are relentlessly announcing their supreme qualities. They claim that, for a substantial fee, students will get an excellent education, including studies abroad. Norms of the market, where some are winners and others are losers, are overruling the idea that education contributes to an equal society. Globalisation stresses accountability, uniform standards and performance-based rewards – business values that now are frequently used in education. Other similar concepts are freedom of choice, efficiency, and quality assurance. The “commercialisation of the school environment has become remarkably bold and explicit in its intentions” (Burbules & Torres, 2000, p. 20). Knowledge transmission must be efficient in the globalised school: teaching as many students as possible with as little wastage (drop out and repetition) as possible at the lowest possible cost and in the shortest possible time – but with the greatest impact. Teachers and schools are accountable, which is measured as the rate of students’ passing standardised tests (Stromquist, 2002; Daun, 2003, Rust & Jacob, 2005).

A consensus perspective exists with regards to the goals of education, implying that education contributes to development and to economic growth, which in turn is assumed to lead to poverty reduction (Daun, 2003). With education for all, every country will enter into the “knowledge society” (a term denoting the perceived result of the enormous development of information technologies) and through education the competitiveness of the labour force will be enhanced. It is true that technology-based production requires educated people but it is not labour intensive<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> Stromquist (2002) refers to the fact that the biggest employer in the USA is not the TNCs but the temporary employment agency Manpower and that in Third World countries the informal labour sector is the most rapidly growing sector.

Globalisation has had its main impact on education through finance-driven reforms, pushed for by the World Bank (Carnoy, 2000). The state is no longer the sole financing body since private entrepreneurs increasingly have been allowed to enter the educational arena. Generally, costs have been shifted from the central to the local level, i.e. from the state to civil society organisations, sometimes representing certain ideologies or run by NGOs, particularly in the South (for example, Community Based Schools, CBS) and by private profit-driven companies. This development is sometimes accompanied or justified by concepts such as ‘ownership’ or ‘community participation’. Another feature is state subsidies or lump sums given to intermediate levels and thereafter as a per pupil payment to the schools (Daun, 2003).

In the North but increasingly also in the South, marketing of schools is linked to parental choice which deals with the idea that parents can select schools and move their children whenever they want i.e. those parents who can afford to. So far the argument that privatisation leads to improved academic quality has not been proven to be true (Riddel, 1993, quoted by Daun, 2002).

Higher education is maybe most affected by globalisation. Private entrepreneurs have created institutions and adapted courses to respond to market interests for specific labour. Humanities and social sciences have decreased while natural science and technologies have increased their space in curricula. Privatised higher education has increased access to higher education institutions but the status and prestige of institutions has shifted as a result. Women, however, have gained from this differentiation since new private institutions admit women to a higher degree than do elite universities (Stromquist, 2002).

## Education as a right

Besides promoting the values that the current economic forces impose, rationality, competitiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, other ideas are also endorsed: human rights, citizenship, life skills and sex education. All of these have appeared as subjects on the timetable. Secular education is the rule in most countries. Usually, the first foreign language pupils study is English. The “globalised common denominators” (Daun, 2003, p. 18) are decentralisation, privatisation, freedom of choice, individual autonomy, and education as an individual right. The perspective that education is a human right has partially replaced previous approaches where education was viewed as a means for economic, social and personal development. This shift is obvious when comparing the Jomtien Declaration of 1990 and the Dakar Framework for Action of 2000. The former emphasises the need for education from societal and individual perspectives while the latter accentuates education as a human right. UN documents on

human rights<sup>46</sup> support some of the common denominators, such as privatisation (the state is obliged to provide education for all but private institutions are not excluded) and freedom of choice (parents have the right to choose between educational institutions). Every child's right to education implies equality, which is a sore mismatch with the increasing inequalities in many countries (Karlsson & Mansory, 2004). "Globalisation has led to greater economic and social inequality", and education "has become more unequal in quality" (Carnoy, 2002, p. xvii).

## Decentralisation

One of the roles of the nation-state was to unify and stabilise a country. Education has been regarded as one of the means to achieve these ends but as the state's responsibility as provider of education shrinks education may cause the opposite: growing gaps and instability. The state role has changed from regulating and financing education to monitoring, assessment and evaluation retroactively. This task has not decreased the educational budget centrally but has rather increased the burden on and the competence required by the centre. The state sets the national framework (all or parts of the curriculum) but decentralises all previous functions of the state to lower levels (Daun, 2003). Decentralisation has usually been initiated from above, from the central to the regional, provincial, district/municipal and to the school levels. Stromquist (2002) shows how the 1990 UN Declaration Education for All paved the way for decentralisation to lower levels.

Three reasons for decentralisation have been identified: a) financial, when government resources have become scarcer; b) ideological, when the market ideology has taken hold or when democratic ideas are advocated; and, c) controlling, when the state seeks to maintain central power in spite of shrinking financial resources (McGinn & Welsh, 1999). Daun (2006) identifies additional factors: "a culture of participation is emerging, making people demand direct influence over their own situation" (p. 29), a weakening legitimacy of the state and pressure from international bodies. Primarily, decentralisation has been finance-driven, particularly in Third World countries (Carnoy, 1999). Decentralising measures vary in different countries regarding what issues have been relocated, how and to whom. Transfer of decision-making authority to autonomous lower institutional units is called devolution, with its most radical form being school-based management. Then there is delegation of some areas of decision-making and finally there is deconcentration, which entails a transfer of duties but no decision-making power. These are three forms of decentralisation that have taken place so far (Karlsson & Mansory, 2004). In high income countries the central level has usually maintained responsibility for policymaking, including issues such as curricula,

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<sup>46</sup> The Universal Declaration on Human Rights, 1948, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989.

structure, organisation, student and teacher appraisals, school coverage, monitoring, supervision and evaluation while the financial responsibility has been delegated to lower levels (*ibid.*). In low-income countries operation and financing are the areas most decentralised. Cost-sharing has been introduced in many Third World countries (Daun, 2006).

The outcomes of decentralisation have seldom been assessed as regards participation, equality, efficiency or student achievements but have mainly focussed on the degree of restructuring and the generation of funds (Daun, 2006). Often, decentralisation is taken for granted as something good in itself. There are, however, a number of factors that impact the result of decentralisation reforms: the political, social, economic and cultural context, the capacity (e.g. in planning, budgeting, legal and constitutional issues, curricula, pedagogy, etc.) at various levels, and the popular support, interest and competence for participation (Karlsson & Mansory, 2004). There are indications that inequalities increase with the implementation of decentralisation (Arnové, 1999). In a country like Afghanistan where the state for decades has had no central power and the country still is at risk of becoming fragmented the capacity at central as well as lower levels seems to be too immature for implementation of decentralisation reforms.

## Globalisation and education in the Third World

Especially in countries in the South, lending agencies such as the World Bank, development cooperation organisations like USAID and business companies like the Academy for Educational Development guide or force governments towards privatisation and decentralisation of education and thus contribute to creating a worldwide convergence in education, a world model. The conditioned aid assistance provided by development agencies not only influence the governments' spending on education but also pass on educational programmes including policies, structures, and content designed in the North but seldom adapted to a recipient country context (Stromquist, 2002). All over the world compulsory school is usually nine years, and three years of secondary school is encouraged. The curriculum content varies only marginally. Pre-school is introduced while already existing forms (like the mosque schools in Afghanistan) are disregarded.

The public responsibility for education in Third World countries is increasingly limited to primary or basic education while secondary and in particular higher education is being privatised. However, primary schools are also to a large extent private in many countries. In Pakistan for example, more than 50 per cent of the students attend private primary schools, some of which are prestigious institutions exclusively for a small elite and others are run by trade unions, NGOs, charity organisations and Islamic communities (Karlsson & Mansory, 2004). In many low-income countries the public

schools are believed to provide education of low quality and just the fact that the school has no government funding makes it more attractive. The arguments for private education utilise the market vocabulary of efficiency and effectiveness, and claim to produce more competent students, which, however, has not been verified by research so far, at least not as measured by student performance (ibid.). When higher levels of achievement have been found among private school students it has been explained in terms of the cultural capital of parents and students (ibid.). English is often the media of instruction in private education, regardless of the official mother tongue, which might undermine the use of national languages. Also in Afghanistan private fee-based schools have appeared and in the advertisements for these schools the study of the English language is highlighted as one their advantages.

Community based schools (CBSs) are another type of private education, often supported by international NGOs as a complement to or competitor with public schools. McGinn & Welsh (1999) tell about such schools supported by Save the Children/US in Africa, which led to the closing of government schools. CBSs are common also in Afghanistan. Given the current state of affairs they are considered necessary but in the long run their sustainability and effects on public education are questionable. "Community participation" is often required in Third World countries, involvement that ranges from direct financial donations to labour contributions for school construction and membership in school councils or parent-teacher associations. However, in practice, local institutions are often disregarded. In addition, the term is very ambiguous (Daun, 2006)<sup>47</sup>.

Islamic schools, *madrasas* of different types, are usually community based schools, run mostly by local communities or at times financed by Arabic countries or Islamic NGOs. Carnoy (2002) depicts Islamic education as a "counter force to Euro-centric global capitalism... emphasising inner power through religious belief rather than material achievements ... an alternative ... to the market" (p. xvii). The globalised market philosophy and Islam "are engaged in an epic struggle ... over the definition of what knowledge is valuable and how a society's culture should be defined" (ibid.). Islamic education can be characterised as moral or values education, a type of education, which has faced increased interest in both the North and the South. In Third World countries human ethics and interpersonal relations are emphasised while the West has focussed on civic education (Cummings, et al., 2001).

Governments seem to have an increasing interest in controlling Islamic education. USAID (2003) recommends "funds [as] an incentive for host countries" that register and supervise Islamic schools including "regulations and punishing violators" and who "make [e]fforts to mainstream more Islamic schools into the national education system" (USAID, 2003). In particular Pakistan's "over 13, 000 *madrasas* ... are of ongoing concern

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<sup>47</sup> The terms need to be clarified in a number of aspects, for example: is community a geographical area, an administrative unit, an ethnic group, a religious congregation, or? And does participation imply involvement, influence, power, or? And by whom?

in the United States”(Blanchard, 2007). In 2002, the Pakistani government initiated a reform, which required all *madrasas* to register with the government, to provide financial accounts and information on their financial sources. This met with resistance and thus the government twice (in 2003 and 2005) offered rewards and incentives such as teacher salaries and supplies in order to make the schools comply. In January 2007, over 12,000 *madrasas* were reported to have registered “but [had] succeeded in preserving anonymity for their donors” (ibid.). In Indonesia the United States is providing \$157 million over a period of five years from 2004 to improve the educational quality in religious schools, “thereby hoping to curb the growth of Muslim radicalism throughout the archipelago” (Pohl, 2006). In Afghanistan government plans are similar, for example, there are measures to mainstream and control Islamic education by implementing secondary level *madrasas* in all districts of the country. In March 2007 the Education Minister declared the need to “counter the Taliban’s use of education as a ‘weapon of terrorism’” and he added that they had established “hate *madrasas*”. In government *madrasas* “a tolerant and modern Islam” would be offered with “40 per cent Islamic subjects, 40 per cent general education and 20 per cent computer science and foreign languages” (<http://www.afghannews.net/index.php?action=show&type=news&id=1843>). This trend to exercise more national (and international) control over the content and methodology of Islamic education seems to run counter to the philosophy of decentralisation.

The international community strongly promotes girls’ participation in education in Third World countries and girls’ enrolment and retention rates attract particular interest. Although many governments acknowledge the importance of female education, they assign limited resources for changing the situation. Much of what is done to promote girls’ schooling is funded by international aid agencies, for instance special incentives for female teachers, separate transportation, food for school, etc. (Stromquist, 2002). Since 1970 gains in girls’ enrolment at all school levels have increased in all countries in the South except in Sub-Saharan Africa where girls’ participation in education the last decades has decreased due to poverty caused by restructuring reforms and the increased prevalence of HIV/AIDS. In some areas, particularly in South East Asia, the need for educated low-cost labour has caused an expansion of women’s educational opportunities (Carnoy, 2002). Women constitute almost 50 per cent of the labour in the manufacturing sectors in countries such as Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand where women are considered as an important “comparative advantage” in these industries (Stromquist, 2002).

Students in the South often leave their countries after finishing higher education and go to Europe and North America if they can afford to. They are attracted by dreams of a better life and better working conditions. Additionally, Third World students who study on stipends or at their own cost at universities in the West tend to stay on after taking their degrees. This phenomenon is well known as brain drain and has drastically affected many low income countries (ibid.).



## CONCLUDING REMARKS

There are researchers and others who view globalisation processes and their effects, if not in all aspects, as desirable or at least as irresistible; see, for example, Huntington (1996); Barber (2001); Martin (2001); Pieterse (2001); Wolf (2004); Lapayese (2005); Perry (2005). In their view, globalisation means integrating and uniting the world. Globalisation has generated an abundance of technological facilities, goods and services, which has led to accumulated wealth and increased living standards: “[t]he economic liberalisation ...is now bringing unprecedented opportunities to billions of people throughout the world” (Wolf, 2001 p.11). Values and practices, such as pluralism, democracy and human rights, seen as inherently good, are disseminated. Globalisation has brought increased access to education, especially for girls and women. Countries are progressively entering into the “knowledge society”. Such a description disregards the fact that great segments of the population in many Third World countries are marginalised in many respects and face decreasing living standards<sup>48</sup>.

Globalisation implies complex processes and a dialectical relationship between global and local forces. Economically, countries all over the world are compelled to comply with the rules of the market forces, a competition in which some are winners (mainly the North) and others are losers (mostly the South). Countries in the South have scarce resources with which to compete and have to accept the conditions set by TNCs operating in their countries. Globally, the role of the state is changing: on the one hand its power is being undermined and on the other hand its supervisory and evaluative role is being strengthened. The state in Afghanistan is in a situation of re-centralisation or defragmentation after years of splitting wars. At the same time the legitimacy of the state is undermined by its complete dependency on international aid. In addition, the state has poor capacity to implement its role in surveillance and monitoring. The global discourse of decentralisation is pushed forward nevertheless.

Culturally, globalisation implies universalised values and practices, a commodified culture based on a market ideology, transmitted through media, in particular television, and in Third World countries carried by international aid agencies. Simultaneously, market norms are challenged; a religious revival is in progress on a global scale and movements struggling for the environment, fair trade, non-discrimination, indigenous rights, etc. have a worldwide networks. In Afghanistan there is an on-going violent resistance against what is assumed as Western values imposed by the US occupation as well as a more silent and hidden struggle to maintain what is perceived as traditional, Islamic values, in particular a struggle for Islamic education. Regarding the Western type of education, the global drive for education for all with its rights perspective, which calls for equal opportunities, actually contradicts the market discourse in education, which stresses production-oriented knowledge, freedom of choice, privatisation, etc.

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<sup>48</sup> The 2015 Millennium target of halving the poverty will be missed by some 380 million people (UNDP, 2007)



How globalisation processes affect the situation in Afghanistan politically, economically, culturally and educationally will be further elaborated upon in *Chapter Ten Afghanistan and Globalisation*.

## Chapter Seven

# The Concept of Folk Model or Folk Theory

The idea or concept of folk model was intensely discussed in the 1980s but seems to have fallen into oblivion since then. At least the debate about its definition, characteristics and use has ceased although several scientists, mainly anthropologists, have elaborated or described folk models as part of their research. The debate that followed after the publication of *The Structure of Folk Models* by Ladislav Holy & Milan Stuchlik in 1981 has circled around issues such as the nature and structure of folk models, types of models, the role of folk models in people's lives, inference of folk models and the differences and relationships between folk models and scientific models.

One reason for the dispute or the confusion is that some scholars use 'folk model' interchangeably with other concepts, such as 'folk theory', 'folk knowledge', 'cultural model', 'schema', 'metaphor', 'folk system' while others claim that these concepts stand for other phenomena and that folk model has a clear cut definition of its own. It has also been questioned as to whether 'folk model' is just a catchword for anthropologists (Keesing, 1987). However, whatever term is used, folk model generally refers to what people think and know, understand and believe and how that stock of knowledge conditions their actions and interactions.

This chapter reviews the discussion around folk models. At the end we present our understanding of the concept and how we intend to use it. Although the folk model as an object of research seems to be out of date, or rather, is not often included in research findings as part of data or as part of scientific analysis at least not in educational research, we have found the folk model to be a useful concept. One intention of this study is to present how ordinary people<sup>49</sup> view and make sense of their world, in this case dealing with the meaning of education, and in particular in the present era of globalisation. Therefore, we have in *Chapter 16 An Afghan Dilemma* formulated two Afghan folk models.

The following account will use the term 'folk model' up to the end of the chapter unless another word is used in a quotation. Before we elaborate on the various standpoints as regards folk models, let us first begin with the two words: 'folk' and 'model'.

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<sup>49</sup> We prefer the term 'ordinary people' to 'natives', a term used by most anthropologists, although 'ordinary people' is not a very clear concept.

## Definitions of ‘folk’ and ‘model’

First, the term ‘model’ has been given several different meanings. In everyday language, a model stands for or represents something, like small-scale models (e.g. of a city) or human models (to be painted, for example). A model might also be a description used for explaining or calculating something (e.g. a statistical model). It can also be something that can be copied (e.g. a legal system or a pattern to follow) but also a human being can be an example or a model, worth imitating due to his/her excellence (Hornby, 1995). In sociology and social anthropology, a model is, on the one hand, defined as “any representation that provides a “rough draft” around which to organise inquiry...” to be used for “testing ... theory [and] devise hypotheses...” (Pelto & Pelto, 1978, p. 256, cited in Jenkins, 1981). This meaning of the term model implies a kind of research design to be used in a future field study. Another meaning of model, more in parity with the above meanings, is that it is a construct that stands for something else and is built by somebody (Holy & Stuchlik 1981). Jacobson-Widding (1983) defines model as metaphor. In sum: a model is a simplification of realities. Among scientists there is also a discussion regarding the differences between a model *for* and a model *of* (e.g. Geertz, 1966, cited in Holy & Stuchlik, 1981). A model *for* usually refers to models that are used to guide or direct people while a model *of* refers to the construction of models out of existing components and elements. A model of something may become a model for something (Jacobson-Widding, 1983).

Understanding of the term ‘folk’ in folk models seems to be taken for granted among anthropologists. It is not defined in the consulted literature on folk models. In dictionaries, ‘folk’ is defined as an attribute referring to or originating from ordinary people, often in connection with traditional music, art, dance, custom, etc.

## Characteristics of folk models

In a broad sense folk models are about people’s ideas, notions and conceptions: their stock of knowledge (e.g. Bohannan, 1957; D’Andrade, 1987; Jenkins, 1981; Holy & Stuchlik, 1981; Keesing, 1987). People hold specific perceptions about the reality and world that surrounds them. People have knowledge of how to behave and act, and how to interpret behaviours and actions. When a child is born, the world is already there in its essence, socially, culturally and physically, and through socialisation the child experiences the world as an objective reality. The reality is a socially constructed reality (Berger & Luckman, 1967), which means that the reality is continuously created and recreated by human beings through their actions and interactions. By thinking and acting in the world each individual contributes to its renewal. Holy & Stuchlik (1981) take a somewhat different standpoint in that they consider “the essential characteristics

of a social reality” as “a *constituted* reality” (p. 1) [our emphasis], which indicates a static rather than process-oriented view. The social reality is made up of elements and parts, which are constantly changing, not necessarily by some elements vanishing and others appearing but rather through continual modification of relations, forms, amounts, etc, as well as altering the interpretation of elements and events. The *construction* is made in interaction between people, and at one time the result is constituted – just to be immediately reconstructed again. Holy and Stuchlik also arrive at a similar position when they state that the social reality is a “process *and* a result of social life [our emphasis], consisting of intentional performances of members of society” (p. 1) and that “the setting of the process and its results are more or less the same thing with different time-points” (p. 15).

The reality or the surrounding world has a meaning, that is, it makes sense for those who live in it. This meaning is continuously assigned by them and expressed as their folk models. There is a dialectic relationship between: 1) the notions or the folk model in people’s mind, which constitute their view of the world; and 2) their actions that continuously reconstitute the world (Holy & Stuchlik, 1981). Thus:

... past and present knowledge may shape present and future actions, present actions may lead to future knowledge, past actions may be reinterpreted by present knowledge, etc. (p. 27)

A folk model comprises the commonsense understanding people have and use in ordinary life. It determines normality, thus it prescribes what is normal to say and to do.

D’Andrade (1987) uses folk model and cultural model as equivalent terms. He defines a model as “a cognitive schema that is intersubjectively shared by a social group” (p. 112). When something is ‘intersubjectively’ shared it means that “everybody in the group knows the schema, and everybody knows that everyone else knows the schema, and everybody knows that everyone knows that everyone knows the schema” (p. 113). A consequence of the intersubjective sharing is that interpretations of the world are seen as objective facts: knowledge is shared by everybody and knowledge is taken for granted. Since everyone shares most of the knowledge, it is not necessary to make all elements of the knowledge/folk model explicit. This is a second consequence of the intersubjective nature of folk models (ibid.). It goes without saying that the “shared-ness” also implies the transmission of knowledge within a group or society. Folk models are public and collective and consist of historically accumulated knowledge. However, as Keesing (1987) points out, a folk model is never completely identical for everyone of a community; there is room for choice and alternatives. Moreover, since the models are bound by a given situation, they may differ given different contexts with the same group of people and within the same individual too. Even in a fairly homogenous society, folk models may vary from individual to individual depending on

who they are: male or female, young or old, poor or rich, etc (Keesing, 1987)<sup>50</sup>.

Bohannon (1957) uses the term ‘folk system’, which refers to the way people “create meaningful systems of the social relationships in which they are involved” (p. 4). He stresses that folk models have “purposes of action” (p. 5). Since the purpose of a folk model is for use in actions and interactions, it might also be an “‘action system’, had that term not been given too many definitions” (ibid. p. 5). The knowledge people share regarding behaviours and actions includes plans for action, which also exist and are shared when actions are not being performed. People’s behaviours and actions are based on their notions of what they know about the social and physical world.

There are various ideas – models! – in the literature on folk models as to what actually constitutes a folk model, or what a folk model consists of, and how it is structured. Holy and Stuchlik (1981) define a folk model as the stock of knowledge that

is presented in more or less coherent structures of different generality ... [with] structures [which] are not set and fixed, but are continually created and recreated on the basis of probably not a very high number of theoretical principles similar to those on which any philosophical or scientific theorising is based (identity, correspondence, analogy, functionality, etc.) (p. 17).

The structure of a folk model is based on items of knowledge combined differently (ibid.) or, as D’Andrade (1987) explains, consists of a small number of conceptual objects related to each other. Each object in itself is a complex model or schema and constitutes a part of other models. A folk model is presented as bits and pieces of cultural wisdom, connected and expressed in metaphors and parables, proverbs or precepts and revealed in people’s actions and verbal statements. However, although presented as fragments, it represents a system, a model (Keesing, 1987).

It seems that not many elaborated and comprehensive folk models exist. There are few real examples and they consist of fairly short descriptions. D’Andrade’s *A Folk Model of the Mind* is an exception. He has elaborated a folk model of the western mind composed of processes and states such as perceptions, beliefs or knowledge, feelings or emotions, desires or wishes, intentions, resolution, will or self-control. He has intentionally excluded elements such as intelligence, creativity, power, stability, etc arguing that the description first must include only basic elements before any further analysis can be carried out.

Whether metaphors are expressions of folk models or synonymous to folk models is disputed. Jacobson-Widding (1983) argues, supported by Helander (1987),

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<sup>50</sup> This is one of very few references to gender in the literature of folk models, which we find remarkable considering the fact that gender roles and relations to a high degree contribute to shaping our understanding of reality and also considering the different and often unequal distribution of knowledge in a society.

that folk models are metaphors, consisting of elements connected with values. Since values tend to stay on in people's mind much longer than rational analyses, folk models are "stereotyped" and "static" (p. 94). Her reference to folk model as a "culturally standardised structured metaphor" (p. 93) is rejected by Holy (1983) as being "completely beside the point" (p. 98) since his and his co-author's intention was to elevate the status of the folk model by suggesting "a broader sense for it [the model] than the analytical or explanatory construct of the observer" (ibid.). Folk models are not "poorer, simpler or false versions of the analyst's explanatory models" (Holy and Stuchlik, 1981, p. 11) but represent the notions, ideals and concepts people have about activities and their reasons and explanations for them. People are not ignorant of the causes and consequences of their activities and their models are not simple justifications but explanations (ibid.).

Whether folk models include explanations similar to scientists' explanations is another area of disagreement, particularly whether they include explanations of abstract character. According to Jacobson-Widding (1983), people construct folk models of things, or relationships of things, that they find difficult to define rationally or analytically or hard to label objectively and precisely. This means that folk models consist of "*abstract phenomena* [italics in original] such as time, space, moral values, social relationships, souls, spirit, personality traits, life, death, health, illness, failures, misfortunes, etc." (p. 94). Keesing (1987) claims that a folk model consists of explanations of tangible and experiential things and notions of what is possible, which seems to exclude explanations of abstract things. However, he also includes cause-end relationships in folk models.

With regards to people's own awareness, D'Andrade (1987) claims that people do not have an organised view of their folk models, i.e. they cannot describe them but they can, and they do, use them. People use their ideas or concepts "spontaneously, un-self-consciously" and their "ideas and the realities ... are naturally and indissolubly bound up together", as Geertz puts it (1983, p. 58). They possess certain, but limited, awareness of their models but are not able to present a structured and systematised overview of them. They have partial and fragmented ideas but are not in doubt on how and when to use their models. They have procedural knowledge, i.e. they know how to do and they have declarative knowledge but to a less extent since they cannot fully explain why they do what they do. Holy and Stuchlik (1981) refer to this difference as descriptive or representational folk models, which instruct behaviour indirectly and prescriptive or operational folk models, which have a more direct influence on behaviour and actions.

Horton (1993) has shown how the nature and functions of Western scientific thinking have many things in common with African traditional thought, in particular African religious thinking. Western anthropologists have not been able to discern these similarities, either because they have not been familiar enough with the theoretical thought of their own culture or because they have been blinded by the differences

in idiomatic expressions. Although Horton's examples often are related to African religions, his main statements are of great interest for understanding folk models in general, and Afghan folk models in particular. He shows how both African and Western thought make the same use of theoretical ideas, i.e. "as means of linking observed effects to causes that lie beyond the powers of common sense to grasp" (p. 237). The pursuit for an explanation is in both systems a quest for unity, simplicity, order and regularity. He lists eight specific features of theoretical thinking of the modern West and discusses and compares these with religious thinking of traditional Africa. The comparisons show that the tenets of Westerns thought and traditional (religious) thinking (in Africa) are in principle the same. The propositions related to common sense are of particular interest for this study and will therefore be brought up here. Common sense<sup>51</sup> naturally seeks to place things in a causal context. However, common sense is limited in direction, space and time and exclusively looks for comparable objects. Therefore theory helps transcend this limitation by placing things in a wider causal context. Causes are primarily sought in the world of visible, tangible things and events but when explanations fail, references to theoretical entities are used. Such is the procedure in both traditional religious systems of thought and modern scientific theories. Relations between common sense and theory are essentially the same. In everyday life common sense is a useful tool for handling a number of issues but in certain circumstances a wider causal imagination is needed and then "there is a jump to theoretical thinking" (p. 209). Common sense and theory complement each other in everyday life, which is no more or less true for traditional theory systems than for modern Western thought.

Horton further argues that the key difference between theoretical principles in traditional cultures and in scientifically oriented cultures refers to the awareness of alternatives, a difference he refers to as 'closed' and 'open' predicaments. In traditional thought there is no space for alternatives or an unawareness of choices, which implies an absolute acceptance of the established theoretical precepts and an impossibility of questioning them. Established ideas constitute "a compelling force"; they are "sacred" and have "an absolute and exclusive validity" (p. 223). When people become aware of alternatives, their theoretical concepts seem to lose their absolute validity and sacredness. Confrontation with alternatives is a challenge and constitutes "a threat of chaos, of the cosmic abyss, and therefore evokes intense anxiety" (p. 223). In sum, the 'closed' predicament is characterised by lack of awareness of alternatives, sacred beliefs, and apprehension about threats to them. The 'open' predicament on the other hand, includes emerging awareness of alternatives, a development not seen as threat

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<sup>51</sup> Geertz (1983) has explained common sense: People have common sense when they are "capable of coping with everyday problems in an everyday way with some effectiveness" (p. 76). Common sense is the interpretation of experiences; it is "historically constructed ... and subject to historically defined standards of judgement" (ibid.). It is a cultural system and those who possess it are convinced of its value and validity. It varies from time to time and from place to place. Common sense claims to be as 'whole' a concept as any other and pretends to hold true since it tells 'things as they are'.

but rather as a suggestion to try new theoretical ideas. Thus as old concepts start losing their validity as well as sacredness, challenges to these ideas and beliefs are not felt as dangers leading to chaos and disaster. When such conditions emerge “the stage is set for change from a traditional to a scientific outlook” (p. 223). How the ‘closed’ and ‘open’ predicaments operate is clearly demonstrated by the villagers we interviewed and illustrated in the dilemmas that are described in *Chapter 16 An Afghan Dilemma*.

## Differences between a folk model and a researcher’s model

Bohannon (1957) first defines folk models as the meaningful systems people create of social relationships and interpretations of social events. He then identifies the system elaborated by scientists, primarily sociologists and social anthropologists, as an analytical system, created by more or less scientific methods. The researcher *learns* the folk system but s/he *creates* the analytical system by systematising the facts or data s/he has collected in the field. A good example of this duality is presented by Sansom (1981) in his studies of North Australian Aborigines. To explain their social order he also included their own comprehension of this social order.

Folk models exist in people’s minds. How is it then possible to unveil what is inside their heads? Obviously, there is a difference between visible actions that are directly observable and ideas, which are in people’s mind, or, in other words, “between actions (“social structure”) and the ideational system, usually called culture” (Holy & Stuchlik 1981, p. 4). The researcher has two means: to observe what people do and to listen to what they say. Through observations one can only see direct physical activities but what makes a “physical movement an action is its meaning and undoubtedly, the same physical movements may have many different meanings” (Holy & Stuchlik (1981, p. 2). The same goes for speech actions; through interaction people assign meanings that are shared and understood mutually. Their movements and verbal statements may be observable and interpreted by the researcher provided s/he is familiar with the context and, not least, with the language in use. Actions are governed by rules and are thus manifestations or embodiments of rules. It is the researcher’s role to infer from the observed action what rule or rules are invoked in the action (ibid.). But how can the researcher be sure that the “right” rule was inferred, that s/he has understood the underlying justification and reason for the acting? This is possible, according to Holy and Stuchlik, thanks to Ryle’s theory of mind, which tells us that “most mental activities are publicly available since they are overt intelligent and intelligible performances” (ibid. p. 24). That people’s stock of knowledge is translated into public actions may make them accessible but does not necessarily allow for a “correct” understanding by the researcher:



Understanding is part of knowing how. The knowledge that is required for understanding intelligent performances of a specific kind is some degree of competence in performance of that kind (Ryle, 1949, cited in Holy & Stuchlik 1981, p. 24).

Consequently, while there are no guarantees, the possibility of arriving at an accurate inference of a folk model is considerably increased if the researcher shares the mental maps of the people s/he studies, understands their culture, is able to duplicate their performances and make them intelligible. The question of validity is also raised by Holy & Stuchlik, who state that only when the researcher's "procedures have been clearly specified is it possible to judge to what extent his account of the folk model corresponds to the notions, ideas and concepts held by the actors..." (p. vii).

There are additional complexities to the problem of seeing things 'from the native's point of view'. Geertz (1983) suggests a new dichotomy in addition to 'insider-outsider', 'emic-etic', 'first person-third person' and other more or less fanciful divisions. He introduces 'experience-near' and 'experience-distant' concepts. The former are used by informants or respondents to define and explain what they see, feel and perceive while the latter are concepts elaborated by the researcher. The differences are not of a normative character and they are not oppositional. The art is to deploy them so as to do justice to a folk model that is not "imprisoned within their mental horizons" and create a scientific interpretation of the same that is not "systematically deaf to the distinctive tonalities" the model possesses (Geertz, 1973, p 58). It is a delicate task "to grasp concepts that, for another people, are experience-near, and to do so well enough to place them in illuminating connection with the experience-distant concepts theorists have fashioned to capture the general features of social life" (ibid.).

Contrary to the operational models, which are closely related to observable instances of interactions, the representational models are accessible only through verbal statements. As data for the formulation of folk models, verbal statements encompass some inherent problems. People formulate their notions only partially and do not present a full-fledged model. Often, their statements are not spontaneous but rather are answers to the researcher's direct questions. In addition, different people may tell different things. People's speech is bound to the situation; their utterances are relevant for the specific situation at hand, as it is interpreted and defined. Moreover, people's statements are "highly indexical" (ibid. p. 23) so what they say depends on a far broader context knowledge, a context that is understood as shared, true and valid and therefore remains untold. Background knowledge is taken for granted and is not specifically stated (ibid.). The researcher must not take verbal statements as being of the same "truth" as directly observed actions, particularly when the statements refer to specific events. There is a distinction between notions and actions. This is a complicated relationship since what people say is not always what they actually do, a fact that should be kept in mind by the observer. The researcher's task is to combine

the information and fill in the missing parts. S/he is to infer the coherence, however unarticulated, of folk models that lie beneath the surface of what people say and do (ibid.; Keesing, 1987). The partiality, ad hoc quality and situational nature of the folk model must be put into a global systematisation. However assiduous and thorough the researcher's work may be, it will always result in "a model of a model" (Holy & Stuchlik, 1981, p. 23), which is a model formulated by the scientist. Such a model, however, can be tested in a similar way as described above, by formulating statements that would be acceptable by the actors. As to the formulation of the folk model, Keesing (1987) adds a word of caution: "[W]hat we take to be folk or cultural models may not exist until our strategies of questions need informants to create them; or worse, yet, until their response provide fragments out of which we create them" (p. 383).

The researcher's own model, explanation or analysis uses the folk model(s) as one piece of data. S/he does not duplicate the folk model but includes it in his or her analysis (Holy & Stuchlik 1981). A scientific model is systematic and specialised (D'Andrade, 1987). The researcher makes a representational or explanatory model, a theory of constructs to account for the data, including the folk model, and their inter-relations (Jenkins, 1981). In his or her explanatory accounts, the researcher has to pay attention to people's notions of reality, otherwise s/he "would be altering that reality itself and, in the last instance, in the process of explanation modifying, if not directly constructing, the very object of it" (Holy & Stuchlik 1981, p. v).

By exemplifying the 'closed' and 'open' predicaments as a number of contrasting positions of traditional and scientific thought, Horton (1993) not only describes but also explains the differences, some of which will be reported here. As noted by the above writers, words are for the traditional thinker absolutely bound to realities, 'context-bound', due to lack of alternatives to his/her established theory system. They are so integrally linked with the things they stand for that they cannot be seen as anything else. Words are powerful also for the scientist: as strong and forceful tools they are used to control, explain and predict - as long as they are useful for him/her. When out of use, they are abandoned. Ideas are in traditional thought bound to occasions while ideas in modern Western thought are bound to other ideas. Horton has strongly argued for traditional thought as in essence being rational but he also states that it is unreflective. Traditional thinkers tend to explain the character of their theoretical set up without reflection on the nature or rules that underlie it. This is also an effect of the inability to imagine other alternatives to the established, unquestionable theories involved in traditional thought. There is simply no option. According to Horton, as mentioned earlier, theoretical thought in traditional cultures is apprehensive of challenges to the established body of theory and when confronted, a protective attitude arises. Such an attitude also tends to excuse or explain away any failure or gap in the theory. The beliefs have an absolute validity and questioning them leads nowhere - such paths are blocked. Scientific thinking on the other hand, is assumed to represent fundamental scepticism to all established beliefs. Seldom does a traditional thinker

admit ignorance. To do so would be intolerable, says Horton, since no alternatives to the established theoretical system exist. To imagine that the system does not provide all the answers would create great anxiety. Conversely, the (good) scientist has to confess ignorance whenever a theory disintegrates and s/he cannot come up with something better. For him/her nothing has absolute value and other alternatives may appear around the corner.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

People assess and judge their own as well as others' behaviours and acts, and they evaluate events happening in the world. They have resources to draw upon since they have ideas, notions and concepts about the social and physical world they live in. They have reasons and explanations for their actions and behaviour and they create meaningful systems for understanding their reality. They have knowledge. Such is the starting point for our understanding of folk models. However, since 'model' is a concept, commonly used in anthropology<sup>52</sup> and we are researchers in the educational field, and since 'model' in everyday language usually is understood as something to copy or imitate, we, from now on, abandon the term 'folk model' in favour of 'folk theory'. Since we agree with some of the above authors that people's stock of knowledge includes explanations and reasons for actions and behaviour, we find the term 'theory' more appropriate.

A folk theory, then, consists of a stock of knowledge that is commonsense, shared, and relevant to his/her life. This knowledge is expressed as physical or speech actions, which are observable and mutually understood by other actors. The stock of knowledge, or parts of it, is available to an observer or researcher as a more or less structured, organised and coherent folk theory. This theory, however, is not presented or formulated in a systematic and coherent way by its holders although it exists in people's mind in an ordered, interrelated and connected form. Anything else would be impossible if people are to make sense of their reality. It is the researcher's task to systematise the observed and received data, the actions, behaviour and statements presented in bits and pieces and to formulate a folk theory. The collected and received information requires ordering and categorisation so as to make the folk theory understood to its full value. Particular attention must be paid so that the formulated theory corresponds to the one people have. It must not be replaced by another that explains what it "really" stands for. To this end we find the researcher's own qualifications of particular importance. To study 'natives', or as we prefer to say 'ordinary people', it is, if not a direct necessity at least an advantage if the researcher has the capacity to understand the reality which

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<sup>52</sup> It seems though, as the term has a fairly loose meaning in anthropology: "[T]he term "model" is all too often used indiscriminately to refer to any one of the following: plan, programme, template, collective representation, set of ideas, culture and so forth" (Howe, 1983).

shapes the lives of people of the study, in other words, their culture. Therefore, we find it necessary but not sufficient to have “clearly specified procedures” (Holy & Stuchlik 1981, p. vii) to reach an accurate account of a folk theory.

A folk theory, to our understanding, does not imply that there is one single model or theory for each society or for each social group of a society who share a common stock of knowledge. Rather, there are some general values and ideas held and shared by the majority (which does not mean that all of them act accordingly). Also, there are folk theories of different issues, of abstract as well as concrete character<sup>53</sup>. Salzman (1981) demonstrates how different, even contrary, folk models can co-exist as in the case of the hierarchical structures in Hindu society with three parts claiming superiority: the Brahmins, the ascetics and the king. In spite of incongruent structures, forms for actions, interactions and social relations, they manage to deal with each other through a process of negotiation and compromise. Hence, he concludes, unity and consensus cannot be taken for granted among members of a community. Turner (1981) shows, when describing how new legislation was received by the population in Scotland, how: dominant models are reinterpreted in various ways by different groups; how new models are being coloured by pre-existing folk models; and, how models are by no means fixed but transform.

The basis for inference of a folk theory is not only what people say and do but also what they do *not* say, silences of a different nature (Kesby, 1983). Feelings are also important (ibid.) but may be even more difficult to infer unless they are clearly expressed, as verbal, facial or bodily expressions.

Using notions presented in this chapter, we present two folk theories in *Chapter 16 An Afghan Dilemma*: one of the concept of *farz* in education and another of globalisation. First, however, an understanding of the setting, historical background and the present situation is required. That is presented in the next part of the present study.

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<sup>53</sup> Helander (1987) found that a folk model about a specific issue could have implications and influence on folk models for other issues. In his study, the socially perceived gender roles and gender characteristics also provide a folk model for other aspects of the Somali “cultural universe” (p. 1).



# Part Three

## The Context



Photo: Pia Karlsson



## Chapter Eight

### Afghanistan

The purpose of this chapter is to present some background information about Afghanistan. To have some knowledge about the preconditions of human life in the country as well as the social, cultural and historical circumstances, and to understand how the two educational systems work and function facilitates the appreciation of parents' perceptions of the meaning of education as well as the understanding of what forces govern girls' participation in education.

The very name 'Afghanistan' was first chronicled during the tenth century AD. However, up to the middle of the eighteenth century 'Afghans' represented only one particular ethnic group, the Pashtuns (Saikal, 2004). The state of Afghanistan dates back to 1747 when king Ahmad Shah Durrani succeeded in unifying the country.

For an outsider with no experience of the country prior to the wars, which started in 1978, it is next to incomprehensible to fathom how devastating these decades of war atrocities have been. Jan Myrdal, a Swedish writer who travelled and lived in Afghanistan from 1958 to 1960, enthusiastically described the country's transformation of that time (1960). An era of modernisation and industrialisation had begun. The time was characterised by peaceful and pragmatic national policies, intended to lift the country out of poverty, away from ill health, filth and ignorance. National planning documents, for example, the *First Seven Year Economic and Social Development Plan* of 1975 (Ministry of Planning, 1975) clearly show how this pre-war period of development was full of bustling activities, of hope, confidence and optimism. Myrdal writes<sup>54</sup>: "The poor Afghanistan purposefully plans for the future" (p. 269). In this future the country again would become not only a crossroads of cultures but also a "crossroads of the world's communications" (p. 227), a junction for transportation of goods from the "enormous industrial areas of central Asian areas of the Soviet Union" (p. 271). Afghanistan "is so enormously rich. Here was, only a generation ago stagnant, Asian malaria-peace. Now, power stations, concrete plants, sugar plants, cotton plants, textile factories; industrial workers. After yet another generation...." (p. 275) and there Myrdal leaves us to imagine a prosperous future. Strong confidence in the future, which many who are still alive remember, contrasts sharply with what followed: death and destruction, disillusionment and resignation.

This chapter starts with a geographical description of the country, including natural resources and the agricultural production. Next, the Afghan people are described, the ethnic groups and languages and their way of living in rural and urban settings. A

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<sup>54</sup> Translation Pia Karlsson.



brief version of the rich, ancient history is followed by an account of the violent events in modern times. The last part of the chapter presents some features of the Afghan culture. This includes a short description of Afghan literature, art and music. Finally, the religion in Afghanistan, Islam, is discussed which includes a presentation of how political Islam, Islamism, has emerged and developed in the country.

## A Mountainous Country, Affluent and Barren

In the literature on Afghanistan, the country is sometimes seen as belonging to Central Asia and sometimes to Southern Asia (see maps p. vi). Afghanistan is a landlocked country having boundaries with China, Pakistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. The total area of the country is around 650,000 sq. km, about one and a half times the size of Sweden (Dupree, 1973). The country is extremely mountainous. The average level above sea is around 1,600 m. The capital of Kabul is located at 1,700 m. The Hindu Kush Mountains,<sup>55</sup> with the highest peak at 7,690 m, run almost 1,000 kilometres through the country from northeast to southwest and divide the country into regions with different altitudes, climate, and soil conditions (Nationalencyclopedia, 1989). Only in the far north and in the southwest are there sizeable plains and plateaus (ibid.). Generally, Afghanistan has hot, dry summers and cold winters with heavy snowfalls in the mountains. The highest peaks are permanently snow-covered (Dupree, 1973). Several big rivers have dug out deep valleys where the soil is very fertile. In some areas the climate is very favourable for agriculture.

### Natural resources

Afghanistan has large amounts of mainly unexploited petroleum, natural gas, coal and iron. Other minerals include copper, chromate, talc, barites, sulphur, lead, zinc, iron ore, salt, precious and semiprecious stones. The quantity and quality of these resources are not fully known (Forsberg, 2005c; <http://www.afghan-web.com/geography/lr.html>). The gas resources in the north, however, were estimated at 100 to 150 billion cubic meters in 1967 when exploitation started. Some 95 per cent of the extracted gas was exported to Soviet Union at a price well below the world market price (Christensen, 1995). In the early and mid 1970s ambitious five year plans anticipated exploitation of additional natural resources. Copper was excavated in Logar province, for example. In other areas melting factories for iron ore were planned (ibid.). Today, only the excavation of the semi precious stone, the blue lapis lazuli, remains, which has been

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<sup>55</sup> Hindu Kush is the extension of the Himalayas

exhumed for more than 5,000 years.

The country has large waterpower reserves and before the wars the electric power-generating capacity increased steadily.. Still, however, in 1975 only nine per cent of this capacity was utilised and in 1978 only five per cent of the population had access to electricity ([www.gl.iit.edu/ govdocs/afghanistan/Infrastructure.html](http://www.gl.iit.edu/govdocs/afghanistan/Infrastructure.html)). After 1978 the electricity system collapsed completely. Today, reconstruction of the power system is in progress (Forsberg, 2005c).

## Agriculture

Agriculture is the most important livelihood in Afghanistan. Before the wars the country was (when normal weather conditions prevailed) self sufficient in food production. Before 1978 around 60 per cent of export income was generated from agriculture and livestock (Forsberg, 2005a). Arable land amounts to 12 to 15 per cent of the total area but only six per cent is cultivated. Irrigation is a prerequisite for agriculture in major parts of the cultivable areas. Water is drawn from springs and rivers and is distributed through surface ditches and underground tunnels, which are excavated and maintained by a series of vertical wells. Such tunnels are known as a *karez*<sup>56</sup>.

Feudalism, in the forms that were prevalent in the Pakistani plains, never existed in Afghanistan. Dupree (1973) refers to a *Population and Agricultural Survey*, undertaken by the Ministry of Planning in 1963, which found that 60 per cent of the agriculture land was cultivated directly by the owner, 13 per cent by sharecroppers and five per cent by mortgagers. It was assumed that the percentage of direct ownership was much higher due to the farmers' reluctance to admit holding land property since that would increase their taxes (*ibid.*). Christensen (1995), referring to studies by Kraus (1974), Dupree (1973) and Glukhoded (1981), concludes that "the basic characteristic of Afghan agriculture was that the bulk of the farmers were small landowners, who as a group held most of the land". In 1987, the *Agricultural Survey of Afghanistan* undertaken by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, quoted by Christensen (1995), found that 80 per cent of the farmers cultivated their own land when the war began in 1978. The average farm size was then 4.6 hectares. Since then no similar data has been collected.

From the 1950s and up to 1978 the government invested a great deal to modernise the agriculture sector, including machinery and tractors as well as improved seeds and fertilisers. Several big irrigation projects were implemented. Farmers got credits from the Afghan Agriculture Development Bank (AgBank) and production increased considerably (*ibid.*; Nationalencyclopedin, 1989; <http://www.afghanistans.com/Information/Economy/Agriculture.htm>; CIA, 2000).

<sup>56</sup> Since it has not been possible to maintain and clear the *karez*es with the regularity that is required a great number has now collapsed.

During the 1980s the Soviet Union systematically bombarded the countryside. Villages were demolished, food stores burned, wells poisoned and people fled their homeland. The consequences were devastating for agricultural production. According to the agriculture survey mentioned above, 60 per cent of the irrigated land was destroyed, livestock diminished by 70 per cent and agriculture production decreased by half (Forsberg, 2005a). The level of production rose substantially in the 1990s but started falling again in 1998 due to several years of severe drought (Paine & Lutze, 2002). Starting in 2005 snow and rainfalls seem to have come back to normal volumes.

Wheat is the most important crop, followed by barley, corn, and rice. Cotton is another important and widely cultivated crop in areas where the climate allows. Before the wars, sugar beets were grown close to the sugar factory in the province of Baghlan. Livestock is nearly as important as crops. The tight curly fur of Karakul lambs was previously an important export article. Other breeds of sheep, such as the fat-tailed sheep, and goats are common (Forsberg, 2005b; [http:// www.afghanistans.com/Information/Economy/ Agriculture.htm](http://www.afghanistans.com/Information/Economy/Agriculture.htm)). To keep livestock such as goats and sheep is the main activity in many areas. The shepherding was and is the job for many young boys.

Poppy is grown in large quantities, particularly during years of drought when poor farmers had to rely on a cheap and accessible alternative to food crops. The cultivation of opium is encouraged by the international drug market and the lack of control of the smuggling trade through Russia and Central Asia. During the last years of the *Taliban* regime the growth of poppy was stopped but has now increased to a level which has made Afghanistan the major supplier in the international drug trade (Sundelin, 2005; <http://www.afghanistans.com/Information/Economy/Agriculture.htm>).

The growth of poppy can be regarded as an effect of the wars. Another effect is the damage to the ecological system. Poor peasants have cut down the natural forests and smuggled the timber to Pakistan. Deforestation, floods and avalanches have added to the devastation. Many forested areas and farmlands were burned and degraded by the use of heavy war technology and chemicals. The worst environmental outcome is maybe the legacy of land mines. The presence of more than ten million land mines in the country makes it the world's deadliest minefield. In addition, the country has experienced a number of natural disasters in recent years; many years of droughts as well as several earthquakes and floods that have buried entire villages ([http://www.afghanistans.com/Information/Economy/ Agriculture. htm](http://www.afghanistans.com/Information/Economy/Agriculture.htm)).

Before the wars there were about two million nomads in Afghanistan, mostly Pashtuns, Baluchs or Kirgizes (Dupree, 1973), a number that has decreased severely during the last decades. Bombing and shelling killed not only humans but also a huge number of animals, cattle as well as wild animals, and thus left the nomads without a means of livelihood. The seven years of drought (1995 - 2002) made desert out of old grassland thus causing another serious drawback for nomads. Nomads and their livestock are also among the worst affected by the millions of land mines. Moreover,

local inhabitants have expropriated areas, which were previously allocated for the nomads as pastures.

## Industry and handicraft, infrastructure and transportation

In 1958, Myrdal & Kessle (1972)<sup>57</sup> enthusiastically exclaimed when they approached Pul-I-Khumri in northern Afghanistan:

This is the first sign of industry we have seen in the country. No beauty is to be compared with that of the white lines of these factory buildings, and no architectural form is so good and rich as the power dam. They are the guarantors of a possible freedom and independence (Myrdal & Kessle, 1972 p. 92).

The five years plans from the 1950s and onwards (“three decades of development” (Christensen, 1995) emphasised industrial development, particularly manufacturing industry for processing agricultural products, primarily cotton. Factories for sugar, cement, vegetable and olive oil as well as wool textiles were run in the 1970s, mostly as public enterprises. According to Fry (1974, cited in Christensen, 1995), Afghanistan “received one of the highest levels of technical assistance on a per capita basis of any country in the world” from the fifties up to the seventies. This was to a large extent due to the competition between the Soviet Union and the USA. Virtually nothing of these efforts remained after the wars. Minor consumables, though, are still produced in the bazaars by craftsmen, such as tailors, shoemakers, tin and copper smiths and the famous Afghan carpets are still made by local craftsmen.

In rural areas transportation of goods and humans still uses trodden paths, which cross rivers and mountains. Donkeys are still the most common mode of transport in many areas. In the 1950s and 1960s great efforts were made to improve the road systems all over the country and by 1966 a relatively well-developed highway system had been constructed. The construction of the Salang tunnel in the late 1960s, then “a major engineering miracle” (Dupree, 1973), at an altitude of over 3,300 meters and with a length of 1.7 kilometres was seen as an important benchmark in the development of the country’s infrastructure ([www.gl.iit.edu/govdocs/afghanistan/Infrastructure.html](http://www.gl.iit.edu/govdocs/afghanistan/Infrastructure.html)).

The power stations and transportation system including the Salang tunnel, roads and airports effectively collapsed having been next to completely destroyed during the many years of war after 1978. Non-existing maintenance of the road system added to the deterioration. A typical example of the change in road conditions is that of a trip from Kabul to Kandahar: in 1977 it took four hours while in 1997 it took 14 hours

<sup>57</sup> *Gates to Asia*, was published in 1972 but consists mainly of translated parts of the original book, written in Swedish and published in 1960.

(ibid). Today the situation is slowly changing, the main roads are being rehabilitated but still many areas cannot be reached by car or bus.

## An Independent People of Multi-Ethnicity

### Facts and figures

No population register has ever existed in Afghanistan and no census has been conducted since the mid 1970s<sup>58</sup>. According to UNDP Human Development Report (2004)<sup>59</sup>, the total 2003 population was estimated at almost 24 million inhabitants. The annual population growth, calculated at 2.50 per cent, is maybe the highest in the world; it would imply a population of more than 26 million in 2006. The fertility rate per woman is estimated at 6.30 according to the same source while UNICEF calculates it to 7.4 (UNICEF, 2006a). Fifty-seven per cent of the population is estimated to be below 18 years of age and one in five Afghans is assumed to be a school age child (Government of Afghanistan, 2005).

The life expectancy is under 45 years<sup>60</sup> (Government of Afghanistan, 2005). Infant mortality stands at 140 per 1,000 live births, while under-five child mortality is 230 per 1,000 live births, mainly caused by measles, diarrhoea, acute respiratory infections, malaria and malnutrition<sup>61</sup>. According to UNICEF, 54 per cent of Afghan children are chronically malnourished and 40 per cent are underweight. Maternal mortality is estimated at 1,600 (nine of ten births occur at home). Around 60 per cent of the people have access to safe water. There are only 10 physicians per 100,000 people (UNICEF, 2005b; UNDP, 2004).

According to UNDP, the Human Development Index (HDI) was 173 in 2004, which places Afghanistan at the bottom of the 177 countries ranked, way behind all its neighbours and just above five African countries. The Gender Development Index (GDI) that reflects the level of discrepancies between men and women in terms of the HDI, places the country two steps further down on the scale (UNDP, 2004).

The Gross National Income (GNI) per capita was estimated at 250 USD in

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<sup>58</sup> A national census is scheduled for 2008

<sup>59</sup> The first-ever National Human Development Report (HDR) was published in 2004. It is still (2007) the last version published.

<sup>60</sup> The average is 50.6 years in other least developed countries.

<sup>61</sup> The figures from our case studies do not correspond with these estimates. In Sujani and Charbagh only 2 out of 14 mothers with a total of 87 children had experienced the death of a born child. It was a general opinion among the villagers that families had more children now than before the wars thanks to a higher survival rate of children.

2004<sup>62</sup> (UNICEF, 2006a). Some 70 per cent of the population live on less than two USD per day. The above indicators (plus a few others) give Afghanistan the index of 94 in the Human Poverty Index (HPI) scale. Only two countries are below Afghanistan (UNDP, 2004).

## A human disaster

The social costs of the long period of war are immense. Civilians, in particular women and children, have been the prime victims of the atrocities that followed the Soviet invasion in 1979. More than one million civilians have been killed and hundreds of thousands have been injured in bombardments and shelling of residential areas. Tens of thousands have been arbitrarily arrested, tortured, murdered, raped, or just “disappeared”. Schools, hospitals, factories, roads, homes and farms have been burned and destroyed. Between 1979 and 1992 millions of Afghans were displaced and dispossessed. During this period around one third of Afghanistan’s population, more than six million people, fled the country, mainly to Pakistan and Iran. In addition, around two million people were internally displaced. Including the latter group, almost half the population were refugees. Afghans were the largest single refugee group in the world for 20 years and, with the exception of the Palestinians, they remain the largest group with more than 2 million people still living as refugees. Afghans have also sought asylum in Western countries. In 2001 they were the largest group arriving in Europe (Amnesty, 2005; UNHCR, 2005).

Since 2002, more than 3.5 million Afghans have returned to their homeland but continuing acts of violence have caused new refugee outflows. Others have become refugees inside the country, seeking safety in remote areas, in the mountains, towns, or camps. It is estimated that one million Afghans are internally displaced (*ibid.*).

## Ethnicity and language

There are two dominating ethnic groups in Afghanistan, Pashtuns and Tajiks. In addition, there are several minority groups. Pashtuns represent the largest group with an estimated 50 per cent of the population (Dupree, 1973; Nationalencyclopedia, 1989; Forsberg, 2005b). They live mainly in the eastern, southern and south-western parts of the country. Their language is Pashto (but some Pashtuns may also have Dari as their mother tongue, particularly in Kabul and Herat). The Tajiks who live mainly in the north-eastern part of the country speak Dari and constitute around 25 per cent of the

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<sup>62</sup> To be compared to 298 USD in the other least developed countries and to 408 USD in neighbouring Pakistan (UNDP, 2004).

population (Nationalencyclopedia, 1989; Forsberg, 2005b). Uzbeks (around 7 per cent) live in the north and speak Uzbeki and Hazaras (around 6 per cent) inhabit the central highlands and speak a Dari dialect (Dupree, 1973; Nationalencyclopedia, 1989). In addition, there are several minor ethnic groups such as Baluch, Nuristani, Aimaq, Turkmen, Kirghis, all with their own languages (Dupree, 1973; Forsberg, 2005b). Over the centuries, men and women from different ethnic groups have occasionally married, which has resulted in mixed populations in many parts of the country. Government policies in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century forced large groups of Pashtuns to migrate north, which resulted in Pashtun pockets in some of the northern provinces and eventually also in marriages between Pashtuns and Uzbeks or Tajiks (Dupree, 1973). The significance of ethnicity seems to have increased in the last years<sup>63</sup> but still, most people refer to themselves as Afghans in the first hand.

In the literature there is often confusion with regards to the ethnic groups and the linguistic groups. As mentioned, Tajiks have Dari as their mother tongue and not Tajiki as do their neighbours in Tajikistan. Dari, Farsi and Persian are different terms for the same language spoken by many people in Afghanistan, for example by the Hazaras, Arabs, Quazilbashs and by mixed population groups such as those in Herat province at the Iranian border. Although Pashtuns constitute about half the population, there are less than 50 per cent who speak Pashto as their mother tongue. Similarly, the Dari-speaking Tajiks are approximately 25 per cent of the population but there are some 35 to 40 per cent of Afghans with Dari as their mother tongue. In the bigger cities, Dari is the most common language<sup>64</sup>.

Pashto and Dari are both official languages and the media of instruction in schools. Many countries in the Third World have had to adopt the language of the former colonising power, a plight that Afghanistan has been spared since the country never was colonised. Students learn Dari or Pashto as a second language from grade 4 in primary school. In urban areas and in areas with mixed populations bilingualism is common. Mostly, minority groups have full command of one or both of the two main languages in addition to their own mother tongue. Thus, Afghans seldom face any communication problems. Both Dari and Pashto use the Arabic script and are written from right to left.

The majority of the population is framed in a patrilineal kinship<sup>65</sup> that is, relationship is based on descent on the father's side. A *qaum* is a group whose members share a common patrilineal descent (sometimes very distant). The size of a *qaum* varies from all males in a large ethnic group to a minor group of local relatives. Mostly, people identify themselves with a local village *qaum*, which they are alleged and loyal to. In

<sup>63</sup> The old strategy of rulers, *to divide and rule*, has proven useful also in Afghanistan for those in power.

<sup>64</sup> From the mid-1700s when a state administration was first implemented, Dari has been the language of administration although the kings generally were Pashtuns. Clerks were brought in from Persia (present Iran) to assist the royal administration. The Persian language remained as the court language.

<sup>65</sup> Kinship is, as Bohannan (1963) points out, a complex issue and has "biological referents, behavioral referents and linguistic referents" (p. 54). Here kinship refers to a biological relation of descent.



areas with markedly heterogeneous population the *qaums* have diverse backgrounds while in more homogenous places, such as in many Pashto areas, the *qaums* represent rather sub-entities of different tribes<sup>66</sup> (Dupree, 1973; Tapper, 1991; Christensen, 1995). Historically, the tribal attachment was very strong and had great importance. Today it has weakened as a result of political developments, the general collapse of societal institutions and extensive migrations. Few people know their own pedigrees further than two or three generations back. Political attachment and personal relations have become more important than before but still the extended family, which may include 100 to 200 individuals, is an important institution for protection and support.

In the literature on Afghanistan, descriptions of tribes and tribal societies are often characterised by a pronounced orientalism<sup>67</sup>. Afghan tribes and tribe members are described stereotypically as backward reactionaries or exotic types, who are against state formation and government law and order and are instead inclined to take the law in their own hands, often in the form of brutal blood vengeance (see e.g. Dupree, 1973, *passim*; Tapper, 1984, p. 258; Olesen, 1995, *passim*). Few writers have made attempts to explain how the tribal society has developed out of the necessity of protection and defence, or described the complexity inherent in social control and social cohesion. The members themselves see the support provided by the tribe as necessary in a society without government institutions (Samuelsson, 1975; Ahmed, 1980).

## Houses

Houses in the countryside in Afghanistan have not changed much during the last centuries. They are usually made of mud and are, at least in rural areas, essentially constructed manually. A spade may be the only tool used. A wall two-three meters high surrounds an inner compound. Usually, there is a big gate in the middle of the wall made by corrugated iron (sometimes from a container) and decorated in bright colours. Inside the gate, there are buildings along the sidewalls and at the opposite wall. Mostly, the roofs of the buildings are flat except in the north-eastern parts of the country where rounded roofs are common. Grandparents and married brothers with families and young unmarried boys and girls live together as extended families. In the middle there is often a garden with vegetables, flowers and fruit trees. Hens run around, a dog rests on the

<sup>66</sup> According to Nancy Tapper, a British anthropologist who conducted a comprehensive study of marriage customs among some tribes in northern Afghanistan, three important group organizations exist, all with descent connotations: the *tayfa*, containing historicity and a certain territoriality, the *wolus*, associated with political action; and, the *qaum* which refers to the mutual support among members of a social group and “the desirability of intermarriage between them” (Tapper, 1991)

<sup>67</sup> ‘Orientalism’ was coined by Edward Said long before today’s islamophobia. The term indicates a colonial, stereotypical view of Arabs and Muslims as irrational, despotic, lazy Orientalists as opposed to the Western (Occidental) rational, democratic, indulgent people and now this view has permeated science of all disciplines into a “we” and “they” classification (Kahle, 2005).



roof and a cow is tied in a corner. Cow dung in round plates is “glued” on a wall and when dried used as fuel. A dug well may be there too. A roofed shelter with no walls serves as a kitchen. The stove is an open fire. In the cities these traditional house constructions are still common but are gradually being replaced by multi-storey buildings with apartments. In the cities, nuclear families are more common.

## Urbanisation

Urbanisation is a recent phenomenon in Afghanistan and the urban population is now growing rapidly. UNDP (2004) estimated the urban population at 28 per cent in 2003. Today’s city inhabitants have different backgrounds. Those who have lived for generations in the city are seldom landowners. They are mainly small businessmen in the bazaars, workers in workshops, artisans, teachers at different levels, office workers in government administration or are employed by the numerous foreign organisations, etc. Others have recently arrived from rural areas to the cities, mainly to Kabul. Landless, and no longer supported by an extended family, they have become very poor. The children have to contribute to the family income, by, for example, selling food in the streets. Many live a miserable life and may have jobs as assistants to shopkeepers, as porters or cleaners. Some are beggars.

City women, particularly those who live in Kabul, work outside the home to a greater extent than women do elsewhere. Girls in Kabul and in some other cities have had access to education for a longer time and to a higher degree than rural girls. Women work in schools, in hospitals and to some degree in offices. In Kabul more than 50 per cent of the school staff are women<sup>68</sup> (Ministry of Education, 2004).

The tens of thousands of people who arrived in Kabul in the aftermath of the American defeat of the *Taliban* constitute a particular group of new dwellers in the capital. Their political affiliation with the ruling power has made them rich and influential and they occupy many of the high government positions. Many Afghans who emigrated to the West have been invited to return and work on well-paid aid contracts. Thousands of foreigners have been added to the population. The sudden and big influx into Kabul has created many problems. The water and sanitation systems are in extremely bad condition, the traffic situation is chaotic, roads and pavements are extremely poor and so on.

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<sup>68</sup> Also before the wars women constituted around half of the teaching force in Kabul (Mansory, 2000).

# At the Crossroads: Historically and Today

## At a crossroad

Dupree (1977) suggests that the Palaeolithic Man probably lived in the caves of present Afghanistan as long as 100,000 years ago. Evidence of urban civilisation more than 11,000 years old is found in the northern parts of the country (ibid.).

The geo-strategic location of Afghanistan at the crossroads between China and the Arab region and between Central Asia and South Asia made its territory and mountain passes important already 6,000 years ago. Many civilisations and cultures of the region have met here and Afghanistan has been described as “a crossroad of cultures” (Myrdal, 1960). Two of the world’s religions originated in this area. Zoroaster (also called Zarathustra) some time between 1,000 and 600 B.C. preached in Balkh<sup>69</sup>, an old city in northern Afghanistan. Buddha’s religion was born and spread along the Kabul River in the Gandhara region. Buddhism surfaced in the Afghan country and then continued to the Far East (Kuhzad, 1966).

The meeting of different civilisations was facilitated by the famous Silk Route that passed through the country and connected the Far East with the Mediterranean region (ibid.). Another important historical event is the conquest in the fourth century B.C. by Alexander the Great. Alexander first conquered Afghanistan and then went on to invade India. After his death, a new kingdom and a new civilisation remained in the area as an assimilated Buddhist-Greek civilisation, known as the only fusion in history of European and Asian cultures (ibid.). This period lasted up to the arrival of Islam in the seventh century A.D..

Several indigenous empires have flourished in Afghanistan. During the Ghaznavid Empire from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. the country experienced, as Dupree (1973) has expressed, “a true renaissance of juxtaposed military conquests and cultural achievements” (p xviii). Throughout history, foreign armies have passed through Afghanistan on their way to other places, for example, Genghis Khan, Tamerlane (Temorlang) and Babur. Different invaders, such as the Turk-Mongols, Persian Safawids and Indian Moguls, have fought over the Afghan area. To control Kabul was crucial for anyone who aspired to control Central Asia, a fact, which also the British in due time realised.

## An independent state

In 1747, Ahmad Shah Durrani was chosen king by a *Loya Jirga* (great council) in Kandahar. He remained in power for 25 years (Christensen, 1995; Olesen, 1995). After

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<sup>69</sup> Balkh has been called “the mother of towns” (Dupree, 1973)

his death, power struggles between different throne pretenders weakened the country. This situation was used by foreign imperial interests to penetrate the country: the British Indian empire from one side and Czarist Russia from the other. The first Anglo-Afghan war (1839 – 1842) erupted when the British tried to install a client ruler. It ended in British defeat. A few decades later the Afghan state had consolidated its power. A relatively effective taxation system had been introduced, state administration had expanded and military as well as civil schools had been established (Dupree, 1977). This process was disrupted by the second Anglo-Afghan war (1878 – 1880). The British again invaded Afghanistan, now with the intention to halt the Russian expansion in Central Asia. As in the first war, the British faced strong resistance and were once again defeated. The competition between the British and the Russians for control of Central Asia and Afghanistan has been called “the great game”. Afghanistan succeeded in maintaining its independence, though at a high price. “To prevent the British from running their foreign policy on their behalf, their only recourse was to have no foreign policy at all. Afghanistan became the closed country in Asia” (Myrdal & Kessle, 1972 p. 104).

The king who seized power in 1880, Abdul Rahman, later called the ‘Iron King’ due to his hard measures against any kind of opposition<sup>70</sup>, succeeded in establishing a relatively strong central power (Olesen, 1995). The borders were secured through negotiations with neighbouring countries (although the Durrand Line between Afghanistan and today’s Pakistan which cuts right through Pashtun areas, has never been recognised), a civil administration was developed and a strong army created (Dupree, 1977). With King Abdul Rahman the country saw “the birth of modern Afghanistan” (Christensen 1995, p. 14). In 1919, King Amanullah declared Afghanistan’s independence, which led to the third Anglo-Afghan war. The Afghan army crossed the border into British India. In the subsequent treaty the British had to give up its claim to control Afghanistan’s foreign policy and Afghanistan was recognised as an independent country. This day, August 20, is celebrated as the National Independence Day<sup>71</sup>.

Myrdal (1960) describes the Afghan nation building in three steps. First, during Ahmad Shah Durrani in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Afghan nation-state was established (“at a time when most European countries not yet had achieved national unity and independence” (ibid. p. 226)). The second step was taken during the defensive wars against the British attempts to colonise the country: “Then grew unity out of division and of the tribal countries became a nation” (p. 226). The start of the modernisation process that Myrdal witnessed in the 1960s represents the third step, “[t]he step ahead toward a consciously modernising state” (p. 227).

King Amanullah ruled the country between 1919 and 1929. He and his cabinet

<sup>70</sup> 40 insurgents were crushed in his period of reign.

<sup>71</sup> According to USAID’s official website (2006) Afghanistan got its independence in 2001! Interestingly, also the Soviet occupants denied that Afghanistan achieved its independence by its own force: “...the Afghan people achieved their independence from the British by efforts and internationalistic cooperation of the government of the Soviet Union” (Elmi, 1986)

members were strongly influenced by the contemporary Kemal Atatürk<sup>72</sup> and wanted to implement similar secular reforms as those introduced in Turkey<sup>73</sup>. After returning from a long trip to Europe, Turkey and Iran, the king summoned a *Loya Jirga* to inform them about his new decrees. These included the obligation for Kabuli men to wear Western dress, voluntary use of the veil for women, compulsory education for girls, ban on child marriages and prohibition of polygyny. These measures were perceived as a threat to Islam and were strongly opposed. Others, such as the constitutional reform that would introduce the establishment of a representative government were received more positively (Christensen 1995).

The resistance forced King Amanullah into exile. All reform activities ceased. During the period from 1930 to the early 1950s the country was fairly isolated. From the beginning of the cold war and onwards Afghanistan received more attention, and aid, from the Soviet Union as well as from the USA and other countries (ibid.). A new constitution was approved by a *Loya Jirga* in 1964. Parliamentary elections were held in 1965 and 1969.

## The wars

From the 1950s the Soviet Union gradually increased its influence while attempts by the Afghan government to obtain military support from the USA came to nothing (Christensen, 1995). In 1973, Daoud, a cousin to the king, by a coup declared the Republic of Afghanistan. In April 1978 a Soviet backed communist party seized power by a yet another coup. Daoud and his family were assassinated. The new government introduced secular reforms, which led to several upheavals all over the country. The violent resistance spread widely, the regime collapsed and in December 27, 1979 Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan. The resistance groups, *Mujaheddin*, whose leaders and members often had a background in the Islamist student opposition of the 1960s and 1970s, increasingly engaged in struggles against the intruder and the puppet regime. The Afghan *Jihad*<sup>74</sup> also attracted supporters from other Muslim countries. It also led to the creation of many solidarity movements in Europe.

There were many *Mujaheddin* groups all over the country but a united movement never came into being. Provinces and regions were liberated at an early stage. The Soviet forces and Afghan army only kept control over cities and main roads. After ten years the Soviet Union was defeated and the Soviet army withdrew from Afghanistan in

<sup>72</sup> The secularization initiated in Turkey by Kemal Atatürk is described by Gardell (2005) as the strongest anti-Islamic project during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, along with Hoxha's Albania and the events in the central Asian republics during Stalin's regime.

<sup>73</sup> Reforms in Turkey included, for example, the prohibition of religious schools, abolishment of Shariah courts, ban on the fez and the veil, the introduction of Latin instead of Arabic letters (Gardell, 2005).

<sup>74</sup> *Jihad* means a strive, effort or struggle to follow Islam. It can include the defense of the faith, armed struggle, and holy war (Esposito, 1998).

February 1989. Ten years of heavy bombardment, including use of chemical weapons, left the country completely devastated. Defeating the world's second super power entailed gigantic costs: more than 1.5 million people killed, six million refugees, 10 million land mines, millions of injured and disabled people, millions of orphans and widows, and a totally destroyed country (Cornell, 2005). The pro-Soviet government stayed on in Kabul until 1992 when it finally collapsed.

The government army, trained and maintained by the Soviet Union, was severely weakened. The government militia groups, however, initially created to defend the *Saur*<sup>75</sup> revolution in April 1978 (the communist coup), had gradually transformed into armed military groups along ethnic lines. By the end of the 1980s these groups operated more or less independently. They were extremely feared by the population due to their brutal ravaging. After the fall of the puppet regime, a complex power struggle resulted in continued war atrocities and a civil war without evident and stable fighting parties. *Mujaheddin* groups fought each other, militia groups fought each other, and *Mujaheddin* and militia fought each other. The majority of the fighters were hired by local warlords who had created their own local kingdoms. Coalitions and affiliations between the fighting parties constantly changed which made the situation utterly complicated. As always, the civilian population, in particular women and children, suffered most. Criminality, drug abuse and lawlessness spread. As pointed out by Kristiansson (2005), the fighting was mainly a struggle for power and not, as often is reported, a struggle based on ethnicity, language, or religion. Gradually, Afghanistan fragmented and the state collapsed.

These years of continued war are by the Afghans regarded as the worst time ever. Complete anarchy governed large parts of the country. Hundreds of thousands of people had to leave their home areas. This situation continued up to 1994 when a new movement emerged, the *Taliban*. Many regarded the *Taliban* as a positive alternative to the chaotic situation. The hope was that they would bring peace and stability and they did succeed in establishing security in large parts of the country. The *Taliban* installed law and order but at the expense of human rights abuse. In particular, women and girls suffered, as they, particularly in the cities, were denied work and education. Foreign extremists joined the *Taliban* movement. After 9/11 the United States declared a war on terrorism and began the bombardment of Afghanistan in October 2001. The *Taliban* lost power and were replaced by an interim administration under President Karzai. In June 2002, a *Loya Jirga* appointed a new transitional government, which led the country up to October 2004 when presidential elections were held. Karzai, who won the elections, reorganised the government. A new constitution was approved by the *Loya Jirga* and Afghanistan was declared an Islamic Republic. In September 2005 elections to the *Wolesi Jirga* (literally People's Council, that is, the national Parliament) and to provincial councils were held. The Parliament met for the first time in February 2006 and a new government was appointed in April 2006.

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<sup>75</sup> *Saur* is the second month of the Afghan year, partially corresponding to the month of April.

Foreign troops under NATO command (around 50,000 soldiers in 2007, out of which the majority are from the United States) remain in the country, which has caused continuous resistance in many areas. Since mid 2005, the security situation has gradually deteriorated in most parts of the country, due to intensified American bombardment, *Taliban* insurgents, popular resistance and mere criminality. In 2006 alone more than 4,000 Afghans were killed the majority of whom were civilians (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/pashto/index.shtml>).

## A Collectivist Culture, Gender Separation and Islam as Religion

The present study is concerned with understanding the meaning parents attach to education and their motives for educating their children in schools, in particular their daughters' education. Perceptions of education, views on the upbringing of boys and girls and on gender relations are issues closely connected with the concept of culture. This section starts with a short discussion about the concept of culture, followed by a fairly detailed description of two pertinent traits of Afghan culture, the collectivist culture and the gender separation. Islam provides the general normative system in Afghanistan and is described by the end of this section. A short account of what is generally understood as culture, that is, human expressions in art, literature and music is also provided.

### The concept of culture

Culture is a way of living by a group who shares core values and codes of conduct. At the heart of culture we find the values that the members of a certain group share and prefer over others (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005). To understand culture, others' or one's own, it is necessary to grasp the concept holistically, and to see culture as "a complex ... which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tyler, cited in Billington et al., 2004, p. 17). LeVine (1984) has defined culture "as a shared organization of ideas that includes the intellectual, moral, and aesthetic standards prevalent in a community and the meanings of communicative actions" (p. 67). LeVine emphasises the collective consensus on "a wide variety of meanings" (p. 68) among the members of a given community, which does not necessarily imply that they share exactly the same thoughts, feelings and behaviour but they have a common understanding of symbols and representations (gestures, dress, relationships, writings, etc.). In describing their culture, people tend to give statements "about what is" and combine this with "what

ought to be”, a “combination of the normative and descriptive” (p. 78). This is a phenomenon quite common also among the respondents in this study, which will be described later.

Stephens (2007) identifies two levels of culture: individual and social. Culture is concerned with “the knowledge and ideas that give meaning to the beliefs and actions of individuals and societies” (p. 29). Another dimension of culture is its descriptive and evaluative facet. It is “the ideational tool which can be used to describe and evaluate that action” (ibid). Culture is concerned with what individuals do, think and learn and what societies find important and meaningful as well as how these beliefs, ideas and actions are described and evaluated. Of great importance, is the context in which these actions are implemented (ibid.).

D’Andrade claims that culture consists of “learned systems of meaning” (1984, p. 116). Meaning systems, that is, mental, internal structures and processes, have “representational, directive, and affective functions and are capable of creating cultural entities” (p. 116). Meaning systems are representational inasmuch as the meanings represent the world around us. Meaning systems are directive because they direct us what to do and how to do certain things. Systems of meaning are affective since they evoke particular emotions within us and they are also constructive since they create (new) cultural entities. Culture is concerned with meaning. Cultural activities are meaningful to those involved.

In short, culture can be defined as learned, socially constructed and not innate, norms and patterns, which are transmitted by others through social interaction and experiences as well as through direct instruction.

## A collectivist society

Afghans, like the majority of the people in the world, live in a society in which group interests prevail over the individual’s interests. The meaning of life is not to strive for the fulfilment of the individual’s rights and needs. On the contrary, the collective is more important than the individual<sup>76</sup>. The power of the group is a strong force. A child is hardly ever the only child in a family but has many other children around. The adults include not only the mother and father but also grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and sometimes more distant relatives too. The centre of the family is the grandfather (as long as he is active and in possession of all his faculties). The father should be a model of obedience for his own sons. A child of the extended family is constantly surrounded by several old people, grown ups, youths, small children and babies and is seldom, if

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<sup>76</sup> Hofstede & Hofstede (2005) when discussing collective cultures go as far as ruling out the Declaration of Human Rights as “a luxury that wealthy countries can afford more easily than poor ones... [The Declaration was] inspired by the values of the dominant powers at the time of their adoption, and these were individualistic” (p. 106).



ever, alone, neither in day or night time<sup>77</sup>.

An Afghan child grows up learning from the very beginning to think about herself or himself as part of a “we”, a unit to which s/he belongs for life and from which it is not possible to voluntarily separate. This “we” exists at various levels, from the family level to the ethnic (e.g. Uzbek), the national (Afghan) and the international (Muslim) level, that is, to the congregation of all Muslims in the world, the *umma*. Particularly at the family level, this belonging shapes everyone’s identity and comprises the basic, and often the only, available form of protection and security. The reverse is also true, loyalty to the family is requested of everyone. There is a mutual dependency of a psychological, practical and economic nature. Freedom, in the sense of individual self-realisation or satisfaction, is not considered a particular value. The Afghan “I” has no unique, individual identity, distinct from other “I’s”<sup>78</sup>. Rather, the Afghan “we” differ from “they” who belong to another group of people. Children are not primarily taught to become independent of their parents and to stand on their own feet. The sons of a family remain with the parents even after they get married and have children. Brothers share all incomes and expenditures. They share responsibility for parents and also, to some extent, for each other’s children. Within the extended family, the related nuclear families nowadays may have sources of income other than from cultivated lands. Some brothers may be farmers and others wage earners. The former send some of the harvest to his brother in town, who in turn sends cash from his earned salary. This relatively new type of family, increasingly common in many developing countries, may be called a *share family* (Mair, 1984). The father or the senior brother in the rural village has the main authority and whose approval is required for greater expenditures or investments. To provide education for the children and find jobs for younger family members (males) are activities planned together.

Family cohesion is more important than friendship between individuals. Upbringing of children aims at strengthening the bonds of the collective, or in the words of Hofstede & Hofstede (2005): “[C]ollectivist cultures [encourage] an interdependent self” as opposed to individualist cultures who foster “an independent self” (p. 93). The purpose of education, for example, is not primarily to enable the young to take care of themselves, to make a living and live an autonomous life. Rather, gains of education achieved by one family member are expected to benefit the entire family. If someone has the power or influence over recruitment or employment of, say, officials to a government ministry, it is considered disloyal or even immoral (in the view of many,

<sup>77</sup> Sellick (1998) who studied the situation of children in the war torn Afghanistan in 1998 reached the following conclusion “It is one of the great strengths of Afghan society that the vast majority of its children are still enlaced in strong social networks. When the child is in extreme distress it is not alone but surrounded by this social world” (p. 37).

<sup>78</sup> This is also reflected in the Afghan languages, at least in the two main languages Dari and Pashto. The pronoun “I” is dropped, that is, “I” is omitted in sentences and only the ending of the verb tells who is the subject. This phenomenon exists in some other languages too, usually in collectivist cultures. English is the only known language that writes “I” with a capital letter (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).



but not all) not to give preferential treatment to family members.

Living in the intense environment of an extended family with its numerous social contacts entails a strong need to maintain harmony and avoid open clashes. Direct confrontation is considered rude. Straightforwardness is impolite. To cultivate an own personality or to educate a child to have a personal opinion and voice individual standpoints are not highly esteemed virtues. What is appreciated is to be smooth, adaptable and flexible. Group pressure is very strong and “*what others will say*” is a guiding norm.

In various forms of family “conferences”, issues of common importance are solved and decisions are often made together. At a higher level, the group decision is made by the *jirga*, the council of men, which is a particular Afghan phenomenon, typical among the Pashtuns and common also among other ethnic groups. According to Dupree (1973) “values of the Pushtuns and of Muslim religion, modified by local custom, permeate in varying degrees all Afghan ethnic groups” (p. 127). Based on Islamic law and the norms of Pashto custom, *Pashtunwali*, conflicts are settled and balance is restored between the conflicting parties by the *jirga*, whose members are appointed by the consent of those involved. Discussions go on until consensus is reached. Sometimes sanctions are enforced but the focus is on conflict resolution and mediation rather than meting out punishment. The decision is binding for all involved. The *jirga* decides on many other issues, too, for example, the location and construction of a mosque or a school or how to distribute water for irrigation. The *jirga* institution has existed for hundreds of years, and has functioned as a stabilising factor in the Afghan society.<sup>79</sup>

Several authors, anthropologists and others have described *Pashtunwali* in Afghanistan and in Pakistan. Their understanding and appreciation for the term vary considerably and are sometimes contradictory. First of all Pashtunwali emphasises equality between men, as, for example, institutionalised in the *jirga*. Other important features are, or were, as some are on the return today: i) hospitality (*melmastia*) to guests, requiring the host to be lavish and genial; ii) acceptance of truce offer (*nanawatee*), which means that a plea for peace by someone who rather should have taken revenge must be accepted; iii) revenge (*badal*) of injury or injustice suffered by a family member; iv) manhood, chivalry and courage; v) steadfastness, persistence, faithfulness, and righteousness; and, vi) honour (*nang*), implying defence of property and defence of the honour of women (Dupree, 1973; Ahmed, 1980). In old times, competition between cousins, *tarboorwali*, was a common phenomenon and *tor*, offence of a woman’s chastity, were events that could lead to murder in the worst cases (ibid.).

Honour and shame (*sharm* or *haya*) are closely related concepts. An individual, primarily a man but also a woman, who cannot defend his or her honour brings shame

<sup>79</sup> Ahmed (1980) writes: “I disagree with colonial administrators when they refer to Pukhtun [= Pashtun, our remark] tribal society as unstable and without law... On the contrary, tribal society is highly stable and has defined laws ... The fact that society has perpetuated itself over 400 years seems to bear this out” (p 87).

not only to himself or herself but also to the entire family. Every member will be shamed if someone violates the rules of the society or infringes the code of conduct – provided the misbehaviour has become known to others. The fact that others see a misdemeanour may be more shameful than the faulty act itself<sup>80</sup>. Similarly, face is important and losing one's face is utterly humiliating. Conflicts and confrontations are avoided not to hurt others. Appealing to honour or making someone ashamed is more effective. Teachers commonly use shame as an effective means for correcting offending students.

## A gender separated society

Afghanistan is a patrilineal society. The Afghan family is deeply embedded in a broad set of male kinship relations. The male descent implies that only men inherit property. Women's rights to heritage is recognised but seldom exercised. Afghanistan is also a patriarchal society. It is a society characterised by women's subordination to men and a strict gender separation. Women traditionally live in seclusion, *purdah* (literally curtain), which limits their freedom of movement and basically prevents them from taking part in activities outside the home and family environment. The way houses are constructed, especially in the countryside, provides an example of how *purdah* is exercised. A high wall with a big gate surrounds the house and the compound. If someone knocks at the door, it is opened by a man or a child. If an unknown man approaches the door of an apartment in a city, he loudly announces his arrival to avoid embarrassing encounters with unknown females. Men and women receive their respective guests in separate guest rooms provided the family have the financial possibility to have several rooms. Also at major life events when large numbers of relatives meet, women are out-of-the-way of men. Women and men gather separately<sup>81</sup>. *Purdah* has bearing on women's mobility, access to health care, education and work outside home, participation in religious rituals and contact with men (and to some extent also with women) outside the family circle. *Purdah* restricts women's participation in social affairs, involvement in decision-making, at least outside home, and access to public communications. A woman's experience and understanding of the world outside home is constrained.

For the man, *purdah* is about prestige. He is proud to demonstrate high enough living standards so as to keep his women at home. A man is responsible for the behaviour of his unmarried sisters and daughters, his mother (if widow) and his wife. A man's *namus*, his honour, is partially derived from the behaviour of his women. Women's

<sup>80</sup> Shame is a social phenomenon while guilt, which is more common in individualist cultures, is an individual feeling and is not dependent on others' knowledge of the misdeed (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

<sup>81</sup> The birth of children, marriage and funerals are important rituals in Afghanistan as everywhere else on the globe but transition rituals, or 'rites of passage', do not exist. Circumcision of boys is compulsory and occurs at any time between the age of one and twelve; the event is not surrounded by any particular celebration.

dress, partially prescribed by Islam but often exaggerated in Afghanistan, is also an expression of *purdah*. When outdoors, women wrap large shawls around their breast and shoulders and put on scarves to cover their hair. Her body shape is concealed by loosely fitted garments. The *burqa* or *chadari* became notorious in the West due to the *Taliban* decree. It is a dress that covers women from head to toe, including face. To look out, there is a small grid in front of the eyes<sup>82</sup>. Still, both urban and rural women commonly wear *chadari* when outside in particular it is frequent among young women. Young university students and young women working with aid agencies have lately started to wear the Arabic/Iranian black cloak with a black face-veil. Thus, the all-covering dress is both a tradition and fashion. In Kabul, a few women also dress more Western-like but to meet a woman without head cover is extremely rare.

It is important to notice, as Le Duc & Sabri (1996) do, that the practice of seclusion is not uniform. It varies quite a lot between different areas, from urban to rural as well as within urban and rural settings.

The subordination of women can be seen in the context of a complexity of values of social, religious, traditional, and political origin. These values in turn often reflect economic conditions as well as labour division necessities. The web of values, attitudes, traditions and rationales is intricate and it is often hard to determine what reflects what, or what is the cause and what is the effect. Men have control over women but men also depend on women. Values are not static but changing.

### *Children learn gender roles at an early age*

In all societies people play a variety of roles. How to play a role is determined in negotiation by the members of a given group. The role and how to play it may alter from one time to another, may shift from group to group and vary from society to society. Every role is part of a relationship and every role is linked to other roles. The actor plays the role with techniques s/he has learned and in accordance with what is expected behaviour (Bohannan, 1963). Through socialisation, boys and girls learn the roles they are expected to perform. In Afghanistan the roles given to boys and girls, men and women are clearly defined and have but a few variations.

Up to nine-ten years of age, boys and girls are expected to live in accordance to just about identical rules and restrictions for behaviour. They have a similar range of outside mobility and play together without restrictions. Boys' and girls' behaviour and activities are commonly tolerated as long as they are small. 'They are only children and they don't understand' is commonly said to excuse children's (mis)behaviour. The gender roles are not yet fixed. Boys may help in milking the cows or may learn other female tasks while girls may participate in looking after cattle, a typical male duty.

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<sup>82</sup> Pia once stepped into a car in which three women, dressed in *chadari*, were seated, and was greeted: 'Hallo Pia, How are you?' When she responded: 'I am fine, but *who* are you?' she was met with great laughter.

From the age of puberty, girls and boys can no longer interact and girls must, in general, adopt a more appropriate behaviour towards men. It becomes more difficult for girls to attend school, in particular if the school is located at distance.

Most adult activities are gender bound. Around the age of eight-nine years, girls and boys start to learn their respective duties. For example, at an early age boys learn to assist in washing the hands of guests and family members before the meals<sup>83</sup>. Boys accompany their fathers to the bazaar, to the mosque and to the fields. Boys may also help their mothers, for example, by taking care of younger siblings. It is common to see young boys carrying small brothers or sisters although the task is mainly for girls. Girls assist their mothers at home with various household activities and in the garden. Girls do the washing up after meals, clean the house, wash the clothes, go to the well to collect water and to the forest for firewood. If not yet adolescent, girls bring food to the fields to the father and brothers and girls go to the bazaar for minor shopping.

When girls approach adolescence, their life becomes more restricted. The girl goes inside. She spends more time in the house and in the compound together with other women and girls of the extended family and with female neighbours. The expectations of boys also change. The boy is supposed to become increasingly active in matters belonging to the men's world outside home. Young girls should not be seen by men, particularly not by young men outside the family. The male members of the family are many: aside from the father, grandfathers and brothers, there are usually male uncles, cousins (first, second and third cousins) and in-laws in the girl's environment. When a young girl leaves her home, a male relative should preferably escort her. She is dressed so as not to disclose the shape of her body and has most parts covered. She moves around carefully so as not to attract attention, keeps her eyes lowered and does not talk much. A girl, who does not behave in accordance to the generally accepted norms, brings shame to her whole family. Her own reputation may be damaged and her prospects of finding a good husband jeopardised.

## *Marriage*

To marry is extremely important<sup>84</sup> and to find a suitable partner for sons and daughters entails long preparations. The whole family, on both the boy's and the girl's side, spends considerable amounts of time on visits, discussions, and consultations before agreements are made, usually without much involvement of the concerned couple. The preparatory period may amount to several years and end in an engagement, which in turn also may last for quite a while before the wedding. Traditionally, girls are married at about age fifteen and boys a few years older. Now the marriage age seems to have increased for both parties. Polygyny is allowed and is quite common all over Afghanistan though more common in rural areas than in cities. It is rare among men with education and is

<sup>83</sup> In families with no sons, or too young sons, girls may also perform this task.

<sup>84</sup> It is extremely rare that a man or woman remains bachelor.

not prevalent among the poorest layers of the population. A man with several wives is both ridiculed and admired by his fellows.

After the wedding, the girl moves in to her husband's family. She brings items needed for the new household, particularly textiles she has sewn and embroidered herself. Her new home is often situated relatively close to her parental house. A large family is the goal for both men and women. Children are seen as a gift of God but sons are usually preferred to daughters. After a woman becomes a mother, her status and position changes dramatically. It is a great tragedy if a woman is infertile or fails to give birth to boys. The mother is a symbol of virtue and loyalty and is ideally an unselfish, hardworking and caring woman. She is praised and worshipped in many poems, songs and proverbs.

Sometimes, and probably quite commonly, a close comradeship develops between the spouses as the children are born and grow up. Both men and women are very indulgent and caring with their young children. Seldom do they impose strong discipline or act authoritarian towards them but rather have in general an accepting and generous attitude. Men are often seen publicly playing with and amusing children, both boys and girls, and children often accompany fathers on errands and meetings.

### *Labour division*

Soon after marriage, gender roles develop and broaden in scope. Young girls become wives and mothers, and boys become husbands and fathers. The married woman's primary sphere is domestic and her task is to manage the household. She is to look after the family's well-being. She takes care of and raises the children, that is, she is involved in reproductive activities. The man is a protector and breadwinner of the family. He performs the productive activities. However, with increasing poverty, particularly with increasing unemployment rates in the cities, there are quite a few families that depend on a working woman as the main provider. The labour division segregates men and women but brings them together too.

A woman gets up early to prepare breakfast for her family. In rural areas, this implies making the fire, baking the bread, (after first grinding the seeds), milking the cow or the goat, preparing the tea and warming the milk. She gets the children dressed, washes the dishes, folds the sleeping mattresses and puts the cushions away. She collects the cattle dung for drying. She sweeps the floor, washes clothes, cooks the rice for other meals of the day, and chops onions and other vegetables. She tends the flowers and vegetables, which grow close to the house, inside the wall. She attends the hens and may sell some eggs. She plants seeds and she weeds. She looks after her children, breastfeeds the smallest and feeds the others. She is often pregnant. She sews and embroiders, spins and weaves the wool. She attends to her parents-in-law. Her days are very long and she is often the last one to go to bed. Inside the house she has decision-power over what to do and how to do it. Women are seldom shy, reserved or

passive when they are at home. The women of a household constitute a collective and provided they succeed in being allies, they may comprise a strong collective.

A man does all the agriculture work, from sowing to irrigation and harvesting. He is involved in house construction. He tends, feeds and butchers the animals. He does most of the shopping and buys foodstuffs, household items and clothes for the children or some meters of fabric for his woman to sew. He keeps in touch with authorities when needed, goes to town if necessary, and he brings children for vaccination at the health clinic, for registration at school, etc. He takes part in community affairs and he goes to the mosque.

In marriages with affection and respect between the spouses, frank and open conversations about all aspects of life are common and decisions are typically made together on all family issues. Sometimes the man's work outside or community affairs are also discussed.

Men's control over women varies from family to family. A woman usually needs to seek permission of her husband (or father if unmarried) for any activity beyond her domestic sphere and then has to be escorted by someone, for example, a child. Women's subordination is widely accepted and considered natural by a great majority of women and few can imagine that things might be otherwise. Older women, widowed or married with old sick men have a different situation; their decision-power and independence might be quite substantial. In Afghanistan, as elsewhere, there are men who beat their wives. A man who does so is despised as weak and unbalanced. Household unity and solidarity is held in high esteem.

Among the women in a community some have more status than others. Wives of influential or powerful men and wives or relatives of mullahs, elders or *shura* members draw upon the status of their men. Women who work as traditional birth attendants also have a greater status. Women who know how to recite large parts of the Quran are highly respected. Women with education, especially the few in rural areas, also gain a lot of respect.

## Religion

For all Afghans regardless of ethnic origin Islam provides the basic cultural unity. Islam defines the frame of reference for social behaviour, rights and obligations, moral values and ethic principle. Samuelson (1981) found that a good and dignified life is for an Afghan a life in accordance with Islam. Islamic moral and traditional tribal ethics are not antagonistic but rather complement each other. To respect old people, to revenge wrongs and heretics, to cooperate and not compete, to keep a promise, to be courageous are some examples of Islamic as well as Afghan values (*ibid.*). The norms of the social world "are embedded in and often identical to those of the wider world of Islam" (Ahmed, 1980 p. 105). The age-old Pashto custom to solve common problems

through the *jirga* corresponds with the Islamic institution *shura*. Both symbolise the equality of men. However, Afghan values are sometimes incorporated and perceived as Islamic; for example, the very strict gender segregation in Afghanistan goes beyond what is prescribed by Islam.

When Islam reached Afghanistan the religions of Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Hinduism and some indigenous beliefs were gradually replaced. Islam spread rapidly all over the country with the exception of the east, Nuristan, where the inhabitants did not convert until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Samuelsson, 1975). Today, 99 per cent of Afghans are Muslims. The religion influences all aspects of daily life and references to the Quran and to the *hadiths* justify and motivate actions, behaviour and beliefs. Virtually all Afghans practice the rituals of Islam. “[F]ew Muslim peoples in the world observe the rituals and the piety of Islam with such regularity and emotion as the Afghan” (Rashid, 2000, p. 82).

A great majority of Afghans are Sunni Muslims and belong to the Hanafi school, considered the most moderate of the four Sunni schools of Islam. Shia minorities are found primarily among the Hazara population of the central highlands and the influential *Qizilbash*<sup>85</sup> in Kabul, Herat and Kandahar. Shia believers constitute around 15 per cent of the total population (Library of Congress, 2005). *Ismailiyya* is a sect within Shia Islam and has a few adherents in the north-eastern parts of the country. Particularly in remote rural areas, popular beliefs and superstition coexist with the Muslim faith. The five pillars are generally well known and practiced to the extent possible but other ideals may even counter Islamic values. Blood vengeance, for example, may still be practiced. Other customs and beliefs, such as *mahr* (the tradition of a bride price) and not sending girls to school are practices that many people believe are part of Islam.

Sufism, the mysticism of Islam, emphasises inner experience and the individual’s direct encounter with God. Sufism has had a tremendous influence on Afghan poetry. The most well-known Sufi poet is Jalaluddin Rumi<sup>86</sup>. Since Sufism, in contrast to Islam in general, is fundamentally individualistic in its search for purification of the individual soul, it has not succeeded in taking root in the collectivist Afghan society. Samuelsson (1975) did not find any signs of active Sufist dervish orders when he studied Islam in Afghanistan and doubted they had ever had many followers. More recent writers have elaborated considerably on this Islamic sect and believe it to be of great importance for Afghans (Christensen, 1995; Rashid, 2000; Olesen, 1995). However, in today’s Afghanistan, the only reminiscence is the *pir*, a term originally used for the leader of a Sufist brotherhood. Some now use it as a title added to the family name. According to Olesen (1995) the *pirs* in eastern Afghanistan, although of Sufist origin, had already by the end of the nineteenth century become “more a political than religious phenomenon”

<sup>85</sup> *Qizilbash* were originally Persians who were mercenaries in Ahmad Shah Durrani’s army by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. They remained loyal to the successive kings and occupied many trusted positions (Olesen, 1995).

<sup>86</sup> 2007 is celebrated as Rumi’s Year, declared by UNESCO, in acknowledgement of his birthday 1207.



(p. 53). This is the case also today with regard to the few *pirs* that still exist<sup>87</sup>.

The *Taliban* movement is a movement with ideological roots in the *Deobandi*<sup>88</sup>. The *Taliban* had very little resemblance with the Islamist movement that was active during the resistance war against the Soviet Union. Neither did they represent the traditional Islam as practiced by the majority of Afghans. Hostile towards all forms of modernisation, poor conception of Islamic as well as Afghan history and a cadre with only religious education, the *Taliban* mentality represents contempt and hostility towards all kinds of knowledge, including Islamic knowledge (Rashid, 2000).

## Islamism in Afghanistan

One of the earliest representatives of political Islam was Afghan, Sayed Jamaluddin Afghani<sup>89</sup> (1838-1897). He aimed at creating a pan-Islamic liberation movement against the colonial assault on Muslim nations. Afghani travelled and lectured in many countries in the Middle East, Russia and France. He advocated an Islam based on rationality and science, a dynamic, progressive and creative religion adapted to the requirements of modernisation (Olesen, 1995; Gardell, 2005).

As in other parts of the Muslim world, an Islamist opposition emerged in Afghanistan, primarily at Kabul University in the 1960s. Several teachers had studied at Al-Azhar University in Cairo and had been influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood<sup>90</sup>. The movement expanded considerably in the 1970s and attracted not only students and teachers but also other parts of the intelligentsia in urban as well as rural settings. A few women were also part of the movement. The Muslim Youth, an Islamist student movement, actively and openly protested against the monarchy, against Communist as well as Western influence. They advocated for a revolutionary transformation of Afghanistan into a modernising country based on scientific achievements and Islam. Islam was not considered only or even primarily a religion. It was a political ideology, through which cultural, economic, political, social and legal issues could and should be addressed. In the 1970s the Islamists strongly opposed the leftist movement and the government's increasing contacts with the Soviet Union. The movement got numerous adherents in the cities but only slowly gained ground in rural areas. It was influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood and the writings of Sayed Qutb, al-Bannah and Mawdudi and had contacts with the *Jamiat* Party<sup>91</sup> in Pakistan. A failed rebellion in 1975 against

<sup>87</sup> For example, Pir Sayed Ishaq Gailani won one of the seats of the Parliament in the elections of 2005.

<sup>88</sup> Deobandi was a reform movement with roots in British India and represents a very conservative interpretation of Islam.

<sup>89</sup> In Arabic: Jamal al-Din al-Afghani.

<sup>90</sup> The Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan-al-Muslimun) in Egypt and the Islamic Association/Party (Jamiat-I-Islami) in Pakistan are the first Islamist organizations.

<sup>91</sup> See above.



President Daoud forced many of the prominent Islamist leaders into exile and many of their supporters into jail. The movement split, and this break lasted throughout the wars and still exists. The three main Islamist parties, *Hezb-e-Islami*, *Jamiat-e-Islami*, and *Itihad-e-Islami*, led three *Mujaheddin* groups during the *jihad* against the Soviet Union. Gradually they gained respect and followers among the rural population too. Afghanistan is, as pointed out by Roy (1998), one of the few Muslim countries where Islamist movements were rooted in rural society. He writes: "...the rise of the *Taliban* from 1994 onwards suggests that the appeal of Islam for building a new political order has not faded away" (ibid. p. 200). The *Taliban*, however, did not represent an Islamist movement; they did not aspire radical transformation of the society into a modern state. Rather they intended to go backwards and create a conservative fundamentalist society resembling the life of old times in Mecca. Today, the Islamist movement, or better, the Islamist ideology, is strongly supported not only by educated urban dwellers but also by many layers of the rural population. In spite of the conflicts between the Islamist parties, which even resulted in a new war after the Soviet withdrawal, Islamism or political Islam is not ruled out of the political agenda in Afghanistan. This fact was obvious in the Parliamentary elections in September 2005.

## Literature and other cultural expressions

Afghanistan has a rich heritage of written literature. The oldest text from 300 BC in the now extinct Bactrian language is engraved on a stone in northern Afghanistan (Löfström, 2005). Dari-speaking Afghans know by heart many verses by, for example, the previously mentioned Sufi poet Rumi. For Pashtuns the *landay* poems and the poetry by Rahman Baba from the 17<sup>th</sup> century are well known. Story telling based on written literature but usually transmitted orally, is a tradition that still persists among illiterate families. The novel as found in the West hardly exists in Afghanistan. The prose literature is mainly geared toward historical, social, cultural, religious and political issues. The poetry deals with religion and moral, patriotism and bravery, love and jealousy. The textbooks in schools include a great portion of ancient literature.

Art in Afghanistan is mainly found as mosaic tiles in mosques and shrines. Handicraft is diversified; Afghan carpets are known all over the world. Women's outfits have bright colours and lots of embroidery. Jewellery is made from lapis lazuli and other gems

The most common music instruments are the *dhol*, a drum made of goatskin, the *danya* or *darya*, a tambourine usually played by women and the *rabab*, a lute, which is considered the national instrument of Afghanistan. Dancing is performed by women as well as by men at special occasions such as weddings.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries of the world. It is a landlocked and mountainous and has a hard climate. There are only few areas suitable for agriculture but the land is rich in several natural resources, which essentially remain unexploited. From its location at a crossroads the country has benefited culturally and economically but has also suffered from hostile interventions by neighbouring countries and imperialist powers. During the peak of colonialism, Afghanistan succeeded in fighting back attempts from Britain and Russia and maintained its independence. The cost for the defensive wars, however, was immense and contributed to a halted development of the country in the beginning of the twentieth century.

After the last war against the British (1919) a too brusque modernising attempt by the ruling elite was blocked. Thereafter, and up to the end of the Second World War Afghanistan was fairly isolated. From the 1950s and up to the end of the 1970s, there were many signs of positive development. These advances were unfortunately halted and reversed beginning with the Soviet attack and occupation. The wars and atrocities that followed and lasted for almost three decades resulted in massive destruction of the country.

Islam is the dominating religion and influences every sphere of life, socially, culturally, economically and educationally. Islamic and traditional values are intertwined, which for example has resulted in a strict gender separated society.



# Chapter Nine

## Education in Afghanistan

When Afghans in general discuss the aim of education it does not take long before two concepts are brought up: *adab* and *akhlaq*. They are repeatedly mentioned as constituting the proper essence of education. The current chapter starts by explaining the meaning and importance of these concepts. Next there is a description of three types of education in Afghanistan: “informal” education, Islamic education and Western type of education. All are described with regards to history, content and organisation. Since memorisation is particularly important as a learning technique in Islamic education, a discussion about the value of this method is included. Finally, we provide an account of three burning issues that have been inherent throughout the development of education in Afghanistan. These issues have sometimes led to open conflict, temporarily been put to lull and sometimes been resting just below the surface. They are: girls’ participation in education; the role of Islam in Western type of education; and finally, state control of Islamic education.

### Two important concepts in education

#### *Adab*

*Adab* originally referred to the new literature developed during the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries by Arab and Persian writers who combined instruction and entertainment. Stories, anecdotes, folklore and historical accounts from pre-Islamic, Greek, Persian, Arabic and Indian sources were then collected and published (Ahmed, 1988).

In contemporary dictionary the term *adab* is translated as politeness ([www.farsidic.com](http://www.farsidic.com)). It has to do with a person’s behaviour towards others. It is about proper conduct and good manners. For example, in Afghanistan as in many other places, greeting each other is very important. Learning how to greet others appropriately is vital in the education of children. *Salam Aleikum* are the initial words used in a greeting, which approximately means: ‘peace to you’. The compulsory answer is: *Wa-aleikum Asalam* (‘the same to you’)<sup>92</sup>. There are many rules connected to the greeting procedure. An older person should greet the younger first; the one who enters a house should start the greeting; and, men should greet women first. Such is the order whether

<sup>92</sup> In cities only *Salam* is used by both the greeting persons. This is considered uneducated by many people in rural areas.

people are acquainted with each other or not. It is thought that the stronger one (the older, the entering, the man) has the power to offer peace. S/he has the upper hand and can assure his/her good intention while the weaker part should accept the offer and then convey the same message. The intention, it is believed, is to start the meeting in a tranquil and human manner. Shaking hands is compulsory when men greet each other, and also in greetings between women. Children commonly shake hands with each other too. When men and women meet, they seldom shake hands, not even when they are relatives. (The habit of kissing cheeks is an urban and recently introduced phenomenon).

To wash hands before the meals is another example of *adab*. To smack one's lips or burp when eating together with other people is not *adab*. At home, parents teach children, in particular boys, how to serve tea to guests. They learn to be attentive and prepared to fill the cup again when the guest has finished. These are actions connected with *adab*. Girls learn to cover their hair from an early age and to act modestly, particularly in the presence of males. Without such behaviour the girl has no *adab*.

*Adab* also includes rising to one's feet when a person enters the room. It involves sitting in a proper way (on the floor) with legs crossed and straightened back. Someone who has learnt *adab* does not run and rush if not necessary. S/he walks calmly, showing s/he has a clear intention and direction and treads with certain effectiveness. Just strolling along in a casual manner is not *adab*. A person with *adab* does not use big gestures but controls his/her movements. S/he does not speak in a loud voice but talks clearly, softly and calmly. A person should not overreact but proceed in a balanced manner. One should have full command of expressions and emotions. The ideal is a balanced and stable person.

In sum, *adab* is about good manners towards others or, in other words, about social conduct according to prevailing norms. *Adab* is the behaviour a child should learn. To have *adab* is considered useful for a life in harmony with family and community members

## *Akhlaq*

It is imperative that children should learn *adab*. The adults, parents, teachers and others in the child's environment, are responsible for teaching them. *Akhlaq*, the second important concept in education, is related more to the life of grown-ups. It is about responsibilities and duties. The two concepts are often coupled. *Akhlaq* means morals or morality when translated into English ([www.farsidic.com](http://www.farsidic.com)). While *adab* is concerned with polite manners, *akhlaq* has a deeper and more ethical meaning. It deals with the individual's responsibility to fulfil his/her obligations as human being. To eat decently is to have *adab* but someone who shares his food with the poor has good *akhlaq*. Children who play marbles on the road and disturb the neighbours may have no *adab*

but if one of them cheats or steals marbles from another, he has bad *akhlaq*.

*Akhlaq* is related to two essential concepts in Islam: *haram* and *halal*. *Halal* means ‘allowed’ or ‘permissible’ while *haram* is used for the opposite: something that is prohibited. A child is instructed not to do *haram* things such as stealing, cheating, quarrelling or making trouble for others. Such actions are considered bad *akhlaq*. Boys who fight are regarded as having bad *akhlaq* and are separated and rebuked if adults are close by. Girls seldom fight physically but may battle verbally and slander others, which is also considered bad *akhlaq*. A child who tries to bypass the queue outside a shop has no *adab* while an adult who gently helps a shy child to come up first has good *akhlaq*.

Although it is more related to adults, *akhlaq* also involves responsibilities for children. Such duties increase as the child grows up. Children are expected to help their parents in various ways, and a child who tries to escape such responsibilities has bad *akhlaq*. In *Chapter 13 What is the Meaning, adab and akhlaq* are discussed more thoroughly.

## Informal education

Informal education, that is, non-institutional learning of knowledge, skills, traditions, beliefs and values has been and still is very important in Afghanistan. Such education also transmits the prevailing gender roles. Boys, particularly in rural areas, learn, for example, about animal husbandry and how to sow and harvest, ride horses, construct houses and use a bow or a gun. Girls learn about household activities such as cooking and baking, cleaning and washing, and how to take care of children and elderly people. She learns the duties of motherhood and wifehood: to care for the family, to raise children, to obey and respect her husband and parents-in-law. The boy, who will become a husband and father, learns to take responsibility for the family. He should guide, control and respect his wife as well as support and protect her, his children and parents. In addition, as a young boy he gradually learns to take part in community affairs.

Traditions and values are often transmitted orally through poetry and stories. The stories have an ethical message and advise readers/listeners on moral matters. Respect and responsibility are important in addition to virtues such as honesty and courage. It is commonly agreed that children should be taught to be kind, empathetic, diligent and obedient. Adults are obliged to treat children kindly. Other important values in the folk stories include unity and equality. Many stories and poems tell about the duty to fight against oppression in all forms. There are some 30 to 40 stories which are well known by most people and have been transmitted verbally over hundreds of years from generation to generation. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century many of these stories were compiled in a book called *Mili Hendara*, National Mirror. In Dari speaking areas they

read and recite ancient books in Persian, written hundreds of years ago. Two of these books are also used by children in the mosque schools. The morals reflected in these books also highlight values such as generosity and hospitality, which are generally considered, by Afghans as well as visitors, to be a typical and imperative Afghan characteristic.

Informal education also includes teaching and learning of Islam, and includes, for example, references to Islam on everyday issues and moral behaviour. Praying rituals are practiced at home by the mother and conveyed to her daughters while the boys accompany their father to the mosque. The history of Islam and the life story of the Prophet are topics that are often told in the home.

## Islamic education

Islamic education has a long tradition in Afghanistan. It began with the arrival of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Male individuals who had acquired knowledge of Islam through *madrasas* or individual studies have been teaching in the mosques for hundreds of years. This type of Islamic education is still common (Amaj, 1991; Rafi, 1999). In 1960, 8.5 per cent of Afghan men were working as religious teachers as a full or part time occupation (Dupree, 1973).

Formal Islamic education differs from the informal Islamic instruction in at least three respects: 1) it takes place in a specific setting, for example in a mosque or in a *madrasa*. Most mosques, even the very simple ones, have a special “classroom” for teaching and learning; 2) a special teacher is appointed, often the imam of the mosque; and 3) written material is studied. In addition to the Quran and the *hadiths*, several other books are studied. In the first Islamic schools, moral education as well as reading, writing and arithmetic were taught. Sometimes vocational education was included, for example calligraphy and bookkeeping (Rafi, 1999). To read and memorise the Quran is, however, the prime objective of Islamic education. A person who has memorised the entire Quran, a *Qari*, is highly respected in Afghanistan.

Girls have always been excluded from formal Islamic education in Afghanistan. After the elementary instruction girls get in the mosque school, their opportunity to learn about Islam is mainly through primary education. Consequently, the knowledge girls and women in Afghanistan possess about Islam is much more limited than what boys and men have learned, unless their father, husband or brothers have taught them at home. The few women with university training are exceptions. Around 250 female students were registered in 2005 at the Faculty of *Shariat* in Kabul University. They were admitted directly from secondary school while the male students at the same institution had been students of *madrasas*. Some of these women will work as teachers or judges after completing their studies.

In 2006, a few *madrasas* for girls opened. The recently introduced government

*madrasas* with grades at secondary level are intended also for girls.

For a long time the state has sought to control Islamic education with varying degrees of efficiency and success. Khattak (1986) has described this struggle as follows: "Since the early days of Afghan governments until now the administration has tried by various means to get rid of these influences [by religious instructors] and to administer Islamic instructions through State Agencies" (p. 46). This aspiration to control Islamic education is still evident today.

## Memorisation as a learning technique in Islamic education

People in illiterate environments depend on their memory capacity. There are no notebooks or calendars to aid recollection. Memorising is natural and necessary. To be able to memorise parts of the Quran is a practical need among illiterate people in Afghanistan. Some *suras* are read when praying and unless they are memorised, a person is not able to perform the daily prayers. For a Muslim, praying involves an obligation towards Allah but also a personal joy. It is a spiritual experience that gives satisfaction. Prayers may be performed individually or as a collective act. Prayers can be performed publicly such as men's praying in the mosque or in private, which is common when women pray. Individual or collective, private or public, praying is, aside from its religious meaning, a social undertaking that every Afghan embraces from an early age. It is practically unthinkable to imagine an Afghan who does not pray. S/he would be an outcast, at least if s/he lives in rural Afghanistan.

The tradition of oral recitation has continued throughout the centuries all over the Muslim world. The Western type of education did not enter into a void when it was introduced in Muslim countries but was confronted with a well-established tradition of learning. Memorisation has a long tradition and is a technique held in high esteem. It is the main technique for learning also in primary education.

Western learning theorists and practitioners have limited appreciation of memorisation as a learning technique. Often it is taken for granted that memorisation excludes understanding. Particularly, to learn by heart something that is not understood, like the text of the Quran, is seen as utterly meaningless. It is often forgotten that young children in Western type of schools all over the world memorise many items without comprehension. One example is the multiplication table. Eight or nine year old children seldom have problems learning the tables by heart but only at an older age are they able to understand why, for instance,  $4 \times 4 = 16$  (or many other mathematical symbols for that matter; see, for example, Piaget, 1954). The child's maturation level has certain implications when learning abstract and symbolic issues. However, many theorists advocate that a proper method of instruction can overcome or at least facilitate understanding of complicated abstract phenomena (Bruner 1971; Bandura, 1986).

For children memorising the Quran is often a pleasure. The beauty of the



rhymes, the rhythm and the intonation (much like Western children appreciate and recite nursery rhymes or poems without understanding the meanings) (Boyle, 2004).

Body movements often accompany Quran reading. It is since long acknowledged that learning can be facilitated by manipulating with objects, engaging in body movements, adding supportive rhythms or similar activities. In Muslim countries, the students at *madrasas*, who sit cross-legged and rhythmically bow forwards and back to support their learning have become a fearsome or ridiculed picture in Western literature and media. The students are associated with mentally retarded children or the activities are explained as part of advanced brainwashing and terrorist training<sup>93</sup>. The preference for individual learning and competitiveness is so ingrained in the Western mind set that a collectivist spirit and mass learning is experienced as threatening. The Western model of the individual silently studying on his/her own is in sharp contrast to the picture of a large group orally reciting all together. Wagner (1993) who studied literacy achievement in Morocco has characterised Islamic versus Western type of education as follows in Table 9.1:

**Table 9.1: Islamic versus Western type of education**

Islamic education	Western-style education
Collective spirit;group studies	Individualism; competitive examinations
Oral reading, recitation skills	Silent reading
Memorisation as goal	Comprehension as goal

*Source:* Wagner (1993, p.78)

These characteristics are typical for all forms of Islamic education in Afghanistan: in the mosque schools as well as in the different types of *madrasas* and in the Quran schools.

### The Mosque School

The mosque school provides the first level of Islamic education. The basic elements of Islam are taught to all children who live in the neighbourhood of the mosque. It is non-formal in character: there are no entrance admission criteria, no fees, no grade system, no examinations, no certificates and participation is voluntary (but compulsory in practise). There are mosque schools in all villages and town blocks except in some extremely poor and isolated villages where the population cannot afford the small

<sup>93</sup> A report from The Library of Congress (Washington) refers to *madrasas* as “wholly unconcerned with religious scholarship and [with a focus] solely on teaching violence” (Armanios, 2003, p. 3)

contribution that is provided to the teacher.

Virtually all children, boys and girls, attend a mosque school, particularly in wintertime when families do not require children's participation in farming activities. In some villages, the mosque school is mainly intended for pre-school children while in others it serves older children and complements the primary school. Some children continue to attend the mosque school for many years while others spend only a year or two. Attendance is irregular. Most children participate on a daily basis but some study only occasionally in the mosque school. Boys may continue for many years but girls tend to quit when they are around eleven or twelve years old. It is not regarded as appropriate for males to teach girls after that age and there are only male teachers in the mosque school.

The teacher in the mosque school is a mullah or a *talib*. Mostly, he is the village imam. In Afghanistan, a mullah is a male person who has studied in a *madrasa*. He has not necessarily completed the entire curriculum but has at least studied for some four to five years. When he studied in the *madrasa* he was a *talib*, a student of Islam. A mullah may be hired by the villagers to work as imam in the mosque (then sometimes called mullah-imam). The imam is responsible for the mosque. He leads the prayers, and sometimes he teaches the children. His duties also include providing guidance on various Islamic matters to the villagers, men as well as women (but for the latter group in reality only to a limited extent). Moreover, he conducts ceremonies such as funerals and marriages. The imam also suggests names for new-borns. To be imam is thus a profession<sup>94</sup>. To be a mullah, on the other hand, is to have a title. A mullah is a man who is learned in Islamic matters but who has some other occupation. For his living he may work as a farmer, a teacher, a watchmaker or anything else. The imam is contracted by the village community, by the people who inhabit the "catchment" area of the mosque. In some villages the imam is paid, usually in kind, through the *zakat* system. This is a voluntary contribution system, which urges everyone to contribute ten per cent of the harvest to finance collective needs and to assist the poorest people<sup>95</sup>. Sometimes an imam instead receives a salary, which is more or less equivalent to the salary of a primary school teacher. The poorest villagers have no obligation to pay him but the imam is obliged to guide and teach all inhabitants of the village. He has achieved more Islamic knowledge than others and is therefore compelled to share his knowledge.

It is generally agreed that all children should learn the basics of Islam. This entails learning to read the Quran and memorise some minor parts of it. It also includes learning the five pillars of Islam, the praying rituals and Islamic ethics. Memorisation of Quranic verses, prayers and praying rituals are taught verbally to the children while books are used when learning, for example, the Arabic letters.

<sup>94</sup> However, the word imam is also used for anyone who leads the prayer. If two or more Afghans pray together, one of them takes the role as imam.

<sup>95</sup> *Zakat* is *farz* (obligatory) according to Islam. Landowners but not tenants pay one tenth of the harvest. In addition 2.5 per cent of money accumulated by the end of the year should be given to the poor.

Most of the letters in the Afghan languages of Pashto and Dari are identical to the 28 Arabic ones (a few more letters are included in the Afghan languages). These letters differ considerably from, for example, the Latin alphabet, particularly as only consonants and long vowels are represented. Short vowel sounds exist frequently but are not represented by letters and the reader must figure out which short vowel sound(s) should be heard after the consonant so s/he can comprehend the words and the text. Therefore, the reader must be familiar with many words in order to pronounce the words correctly and grasp the content of the text.

Thus when children start reading the Quran the short vowels are marked with special signs to guide the reading. Quran studies start with reading the first *separa*<sup>96</sup>. When one *separa* has been learned all the others are easy to read. Most children learn to read the Quran in two to three years. Parts of the last *separa*, from the 90<sup>th</sup> to the 114<sup>th</sup> *sura*, are memorised and recited in prayers. Only occasionally is the Quranic text translated or explained to the children.

*Shoroti Salat*, 'Conditions for Praying', is another book in mosque schools. It is about prayers and praying rituals. It is also written in Arabic and the teacher translates the text for the children. The next book is *Quduri*, which is about the five pillars and the faith of Islam. In addition, two books with moral poems and stories are common in all mosque schools. First, *Panj Ketab* (Five Books), which consists of poetry written by centuries old authors; three of these were from Afghanistan and two from neighbouring countries. *Gulistan* (Flower Garden) is also ancient and includes stories and poems by the Sufi poet Sadi from Persia. Pashto speaking children read a translation. The old language is usually explained by the mullah-teacher. These books together with the teacher's explanations and comments are what constitute a moral education in the mosque school. An example is the following extract of a story in *Gulistan*:

*One day, in the pride of youth, I had travelled hard and arrived perfectly exhausted in the evening at the foot of an acclivity. A weak old man, who had likewise been following the caravan, came and asked me why I was sleeping, this not being the place for it. I replied: 'How am I to travel, having lost the use of my feet?' He said: 'Hast thou not heard that it is better to walk gently and to halt now and then than to run and to become exhausted?'*

*O thou who desirest to reach the station  
Take my advice and learn patience.  
An Arab horse gallops twice in a race.  
A camel ambles gently night and day (Sadi, ~ 1200).*

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<sup>96</sup>There are totally 30 *separas* in the Quran.

In addition to reading these books, children are engaged in writing letters and numbers on their slates. They also learn simple arithmetic.

Direct teaching, as when the teacher speaks and the students listen, is the dominant method. The best way for a student who wishes to express his/her respect for the teacher is to listen. Respect for teachers is mandatory. The mullah-teacher is usually highly respected for his great knowledge. The children are also respected. To be kind and gracious towards children is regarded as an Islamic obligation. That the mullah-teacher sometimes uses a stick is accepted and not regarded as disrespect. Excessive use is, however, strongly condemned. Learning in the mosque school (as in most educational settings in Afghanistan) is a passive act. One can, however, find mullahs with inborn pedagogical talents who adapt their teaching to the children's level. Normally, students learn individually and at their own pace. The classes can be quite big - and noisy! Sometimes there are more than 100 students of varying ages in the mosque school.

## The *Madrasa*

*Madrasas*, or Islamic schools, have a long history in Afghanistan. Until recently hundreds, maybe thousands, of *madrasas* existed in most big villages and towns. *Madrasas* have always been a community affair. They are boarding institutions and students from different villages attend the school and live together. Generally, education is free of charge and the costs are shared by the local community responsible for running the school. The aim of the *madrasa* is to provide the specialists an Islamic society needs or, in other words, to produce masters in Islamic theology and law. A mullah is, as mentioned, an adult man who has studied in a *madrasa*. He has high status as a learned person - but there are also many good jokes about mullahs! Today's younger mullahs usually have primary and sometimes secondary education in addition to Islamic studies. Mullahs work as teachers in the *madrasa*. Sometimes a mullah is called *maulawi*. There is no clear-cut definition of what constitutes a *maulawi*. He has completed Islamic studies at a *madrasa* and he is often, or has been, a teacher of Islamic subjects, mostly at a renowned *madrasa*. He has certain life experience and is thus not very young but he is not necessarily an old man either.

A broad spectrum of religious subjects is studied in the *madrasa*. Among these are: *fiqh*, Islamic jurisprudence; *tafsir*, interpretations of the Quran; *hadiths*, sayings by the Prophet Mohammed; *sira*, actions by the Prophet Mohammed; *miras*, laws of inheritance; and, *tawhid*, unity of God. Philosophy, logic, rhetoric, metaphysics and theology are other subjects that are taught and books by, for example, Ibn Sina, al-Farabi and Socrates are studied. The study of Islamic ethics and rituals and the proper recitation of the Quran are particularly important. In addition, Arabic language and literature and Persian classics are studied. Natural sciences, such as medicine and astrology are subjects studied at higher levels.

Students normally participate in the mosque school for some years before beginning in the *madrasa* at which point they have achieved some basic knowledge of Islam as well as elementary skills in reading, writing and counting. These students are usually highly motivated and often dedicate many years to their studies. They attend on irregular and individual basis and decide themselves at what pace they wish to learn and for how long. If they get bored of one teacher they can go to another (at least if they study in a big *madrasa*) or they can change school and become a student at another *madrasa*. In the past, students created their own study programme. They would walk long distances to attend a special *madrasa* with famous and prominent teachers. A diligent student might complete the entire training in ten years but usually a longer time is required to complete a *madrasa* education. A student graduates from the *madrasa* after completing the defined books in the different subjects. There is no specific examination but after completion a special ceremony (*Dastarbandi*) and a feast are arranged. The student gets a white turban wound around his head. Previously, students would go abroad to a celebrated centre to further pursue their studies, for example, to Bokhara, Samarqand, Deoband or Delhi.

Anyone who has studied Islam comprehensively can become imam but in order to become a judge or a lawyer, specified training is stipulated by the government. Principally, only graduates from the Faculty of *Shariat* at the University are allowed to work as judges but in practice graduates from the former government *madrasas* have also been approved as judges.

In the beginning of the 1970s, in addition to the many village and city *madrasas*, there were some ten to fifteen Islamic schools of extraordinary reputation in Afghanistan (here called regional *madrasas*) with a large number of *taliban* and prominent scholars as teachers. These particular *madrasas* followed a predetermined curriculum and the training ran for a fixed number of years. The students were grouped into classes like in public schools. Students from small village *madrasas* often completed their Islamic studies in these *madrasas*. There were many similarities to the government *madrasas* (see below) with one important exception: they were community based and managed and thus, not controlled by the government. They were independent institutions and were not concerned about the requirements set up by the Ministry of Education regarding, for example, student admissions. A few of these *madrasas* still exist such as those in the provinces of Ghazni and Kunduz.

The few (around nine) government *madrasas* that existed before the wars had a government determined curriculum. The first government *madrasa* was launched by King Amanullah already in the 1920s in Kabul. The intention was to set up a proficiency system for imams (Rafi, 1990). As time went on, the government took over some other city *madrasas*, called them formal *madrasas*, and established a strict system for admissions, teacher recruitment, accreditation and so on. These *madrasas* were in many aspects organised as secondary schools for grades seven to twelve with schedules, curriculum and an examination system. Subjects such as mathematics,

science and languages were also taught. Students could come from a village *madrasa* or primary school.

The Communist government introduced a Soviet inspired educational system, which included virtually no Islamic teachings (Samady, 2001), but they wisely left the traditional *madrasas* to the local communities. The *madrasas* survived but kept a low profile during this period. The teachers were officially accused of backwardness and the students, particularly those who studied at higher levels, were called ‘black reactionaries’ (due to their black beards). However, the government *madrasas* remained. Even during the Communist rule there was still a need for Islamic judges since the Shariah law system was partially persevered.

The Islamic revival during the *Jihad*, the liberation war against the Soviet occupation 1979-89, prepared the way for an expansion of *madrasas*. Some of the *Mujaheddin* groups set up *madrasas*, which included religious and non-religious subjects, with Arab support in the liberated areas. These *madrasas* were strongly influenced by the Arab *Wahabi* school of Islam.

The *Taliban* government (1996 - 2001) introduced yet another type of *madrasa*: a six year primary level school with subjects such as mathematics, science, languages, including English, and literature. More than 50 per cent of the time was set aside for religious subjects. These *Taliban madrasas* were the only schools with government support at the time. They basically replaced the previous type of primary education in Afghanistan with the exception of NGO and community supported primary schools. The *Taliban* or ‘modern’ *madrasas* were, however, fairly limited in number.

The curriculum launched by the Ministry of Education in 2003 introduced a new form of Islamic school. After grade six, students may continue to secondary school or to a government *madrasa* for three or six years. In these *madrasas*, in which some 10 per cent of the total number of students are expected to study and in which girls are also allowed, approximately 70 per cent of the time is dedicated to religious subjects. Other subjects include, for instance, science, social studies, and languages. The intention, according to the head of the Department of Islamic Education at Ministry of Education, is to replace the traditional *madrasas* with formal government *madrasas* and “produce” *taliban* with updated and “modern” knowledge. With government *madrasas* in the country “students do not need to go to Pakistani *madrasas* and study<sup>97</sup>”. He argued that community based *madrasas* are private and therefore are not allowed according to the new constitution. A total of 314 such *madrasas* are planned. In 2006, 212 schools were running; two of which were girl *madrasas*. A total of approximately 48,000 students were enrolled in government *madrasas* in January 2006 (Gran, 2006). After graduation, the students are eligible to attend the Faculty of *Shariat* at Kabul University (ibid.). According to another source, more than 58,000 students were enrolled in all the *madrasas* and Quran schools taken together, out of which

<sup>97</sup> This was a problem aired also by one of judges of the Supreme Court: “In Pakistani *madrasas* they learn that our government is *kafir* and they return as suicide bombers” (Kashaf, 2006).

5,300 were girls (Ministry of Education, 2006). Only one Islamic school (whether it is a *madrasa* or Quran school is not clear) had been established since 2003 (ibid.)<sup>98</sup>.

### The Quran School (*Dar-ul-hefaz*)

Quran schools have not been as common as *madrasas* in Afghanistan. Initially, mostly blind men became *Qaris*. In recent years these schools have become increasingly popular and the male students have often studied in *madrasas* or primary and secondary schools prior to the Quran studies.

### Summary

Table 9.2 provides a summary of the Islamic education offered below the University level in Afghanistan.

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<sup>98</sup>The National Education Strategic Plan (2006-2010) informs that before 1992 a total of 13 *madrasas* and Quran schools (*dar-ul-hefaz*) existed in Afghanistan. Between 1992 and 1996 the number increased to 314, and during the *Taliban* period they rose to 1,000. The document states that in 2002 the government closed all *madrasas* and gave approval only to those operating before 1996. The source of this information is not provided. Community *madrasas* are completely disregarded in this document (Ministry of Education, 2006).

Table 9.2: Islamic education in Afghanistan

Type	Students	Teacher	Admission	Administered/ supervised by	Certification	Main content	Financing
<b>Mosque school</b>	Boys 4 -20 y. Girls 4 -12 y.	Imam or <i>talib</i> .	Open to all children.	The Imam/ the Ministry of Hajj and Pilgrimage.	No.	Basics about Islam.	Community financed. No fees. Students buy books.
<b>Traditional madrasa</b>	Boys 10-20 y.	Mullahs	Open to all boys	<i>Maulawi</i> or mullah	Ceremony	Quran, <i>hadiths</i> , <i>sira</i> , <i>fiqh</i> , <i>tafsir</i> , Arabic, Persian literature, logic, etc.	Community financed. No fees. Students buy books
<b>Regional madrasa</b>	Boys above 15 y.	Renowned scholars.	Prior <i>madrasa</i> studies required, but no entrance tests.	<i>Maulawi</i> or scholars	Ceremony	As above but more extensive and according to formal curriculum.	Community financed. Voluntary contributions. Students buy books.
<b>Government madrasa</b>	Boys and girls graduated from grade 6 primary school.	Scholars.	Admission test by Ministry of Education.	Principle/ Ministry of Education (Department of Islamic Education).	By Ministry of Education.	As above but more extensive and according to formal curriculum for grades 7-12.	No fees. Government financed. Free textbooks.
<b>Quran school (Dar-ul-hefaz</b>	Boys mainly, 10-20 y.	<i>Qari</i> .	Open to all boys (a few girl schools exist).	The <i>Qari</i> / Ministry of Education (3 schools are official).	No certificates but title <i>Qari</i> .	Recitation of the Quran.	Community financed. No fees. Government financed (3 schools).



## Western type of education

Unlike most other countries in Asia and Africa, Afghanistan was never colonised by any of the imperial powers from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. This fact has had implications for Afghanistan's educational system. First, the country has not had a foreign language, that is, the colonisers' language, which so many countries are still burdened by, as medium of instruction in schools. Afghanistan is fortunate to use its own national languages in the teaching, a fact, which has not only facilitated teaching and learning but also has brought about a sense of pride to the whole nation. Secondly, in the absence of a colonial power, there was no need for a colonial administration, which in the colonised countries triggered the introduction of education. State power in Afghanistan was relatively weak during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, contrary to, for example, the British administration in India<sup>99</sup>. It was not until late in the century that Afghanistan sensed the need for a qualified central administration. As a consequence, Western type of education was introduced comparatively late in Afghanistan.

### The origin of *maktab*

In Afghanistan, the public school (primary and secondary education) is referred to as *maktab*. This is an Arabic word and usually means 'library' in Arabic countries. *Madrasa* in everyday speech is used for all kinds of Islamic education, that is, not only for the type of *madrasas* described above but also for mosque schools and Quran schools. In Arabic, '*madrasa*' means 'school' and is normally used for religious as well as Western type of schools.

*Maktab* is first mentioned as a place for learning how to write in the old literature of Pashto and Dari. For example, *maktab* is mentioned in this poem by Sadi (1215-1292), a famous Sufi poet:

*A king sent his son to maktab  
Put a silver slate beside him  
Wrote on the slate with gold.  
The tight fist of a teacher is better than a father's compassion.*

Another verse by the Pashto poet Hamid Baba<sup>100</sup> (1662-1727) indicates the simultaneous

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<sup>99</sup> In British India, Lord Macaulay issued in 1835 the 'Minute of Education: "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (cited in Ahmed, 1988, p. 126).

<sup>100</sup> Poems by Sadi and Hamid are included in Afghan primary school textbooks.

existence of *maktab* and *madrasa* already in the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>101</sup>.

*Better to have no son  
Than one who has been neither to madrasa nor to maktab.*

Originally, *maktab* was located in a bazaar room where a clerk offered his literary services to customers who needed written documents of some kind. Sometimes the clerk also acted as teacher and instructed interested people in the art of writing (Rafi, 1990).

### Education during the first half of the 20th century<sup>102</sup>

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the king recognised the need for trained officers and administrators and in 1878 set up two institutions in Kabul to train military and administrative staff. Only members of the (extended) royal family were admitted as students in the *Madrasa-i-Nizami* (Military School) and the *Madrasa-i-Mulki* (Public School). In these schools as well as in the first primary school for boys that was established in Kabul in 1903, the curriculum was based on the content of the Islamic *madrasa*. Most subjects of the *madrasa* were taught in the new schools. The sons of the elite surrounding the king were the first students of *maktab*s in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Rafi, 1990).

King Amanullah, inspired by the reforms in Ataturk's Turkey, introduced the first educational reform in Afghanistan. In 1922, the first Minister of Education was appointed (Samady, 2001). In the 1920s, several *maktab*s, both primary and secondary, were established with secular subjects in addition to those taught in the *madrasas*. A few schools also started outside Kabul. The first primary school for girls opened in 1921 under the auspices of Amanullah's wife, Queen Soraya. Students, both boys and girls, were sent abroad for further studies. For example, girl students studied to be nurses in Turkey in the late 1920s (Dupree, 1973). By 1929, there were around 300 schools in the country which were attended by some 50,000 students (Rafi, 1990). Amanullah's reforms faced strong opposition and eventually he had to leave Afghanistan. All girl schools closed and the reform programme came to a halt (ibid; Karlsson, 2001).

In the beginning of the 1930s, only thirteen primary schools with a total of 1,590 boy students were functioning in the country (Ghani 1990, cited in Christensen 1995). During the coming years, a few secondary schools were established in provincial capitals and one secondary school for girls was introduced in Kabul. Generally, expansion was slow. In 1950 there were in total 3,000 students in 17 secondary schools, out of these

<sup>101</sup>Both poems are translated by Amir Mansory

<sup>102</sup>The statistics provided in this chapter must be regarded with caution.

four were girl schools (Samady, 2001). The constitutions of 1931 and 1948 stipulated compulsory primary education. The right and responsibility for provision of education was reserved for the state, from primary up to university level (*ibid.*). In 1940, when the total population was estimated at 10 million people, there were 57,000 students in the country. Of these, only 900 were girls, 1.5 per cent (*ibid.*). Primary education was at first only four years but in 1944, two more years were added.

The first teacher training school, for men only, was established in 1923. It continued for more than 30 years until additional training colleges were opened.

## Expansion

From the 1950s and up until the disastrous wars began in 1978, the educational sector expanded rapidly and the provision of education grew at all levels. In particular, primary education expanded quickly as illustrated in Table 9.3.

**Table 9.3: Expansion of primary education 1940 - 1980**

Year	Schools	Enrolled boys	Enrolled girls	Total students	Teachers
1940	300	56,100	900	57,000	1,800
1950	300	87,500	4,000	91,500	3,000
1960	1,100	155,700	20,000	175,700	5,100
1970	3,000	464,500	76,100	540,600	13,100
1980	3,800	917,400	198,600	1,116,000	35,400

*Source:* Samady (2001)

In 1950, fewer than 100,000 students were enrolled in primary schools, an estimated six per cent of the concerned age group. Less than four per cent of all students were girls. In 1955, there were girl schools in seven out of 29 provincial capitals but very few, if any, in rural areas (Ghani, 1990 and Kraus, 1994 cited in Cristensen, 1995). In the secondary schools there were even fewer students, around 3,000 totally. Out of these hardly 300 were girls.

By 1970, the situation had changed dramatically. In thirty years the number of students had increased almost ten folded (*ibid.*). By the end of the 1970s, one third of all children were enrolled in primary schools; however girls constituted only seven per cent of this number. But in Kabul 35 per cent of all students were girls (*ibid.*). A majority of the children in primary schools dropped out after grade three (Daun, 1990). More than 16,000 girls studied in secondary schools in 1970 (Samady, 2001). The total number of students represented 35 per cent of the school age population, and

out of these 80 per cent were students in primary education. More than one fourth of all schools lacked a proper school building. It was estimated that universal primary education would be achieved by the millennium shift (Samady, 2001).

In Kabul, four prestigious secondary schools were established in the 1930s, based on German and French models. After World War II two additional schools patterned on British and American examples were introduced. The teachers and the medium of instruction were German, French, American and British, respectively (Olesen, 1995). A crafts school was initiated already in 1923 and was later followed by the opening of technical, administrative, commercial and agricultural schools. In the 1960s, a Hotel Management School was established in Kabul, which reflects an initial step to attract tourists to the country. By 1975, there were around 6,000 students in vocational schools (Samady, 2001).

In the 1960s, several new programmes were initiated for teacher training, in-service and pre-service programmes, as well as training at the Faculties of Education at the universities. The teaching profession, traditionally held in high esteem, was strongly promoted by the government<sup>103</sup>. An institution for training of teacher educators was also established. Teacher training curricula included mainly subject knowledge. Only three out of some 40 hours per week were dedicated to “education”, “psychology”, and “teaching methods”<sup>104</sup>. Of the active teachers in 1970, almost 50 per cent had studied secondary or higher education (ibid.)

In 1947, the Ministry of Education was given more authority. Its role now spanned the development of all levels of general and vocational education and included development of textbooks (including printing), educational materials and school construction. Within a strictly centralised system, provincial education directorates were established (ibid.). The constitution of 1964<sup>105</sup> guaranteed free primary education for all but, in practice, far from all children had access to school. In accordance with the constitution, an Education Law was prepared, which regulated educational policies during the 1960s and 1970s. The administration was strongly centralised with the Ministry of Education. It was responsible for educational policies, organisation and supervision (through provincial directors), as well as for the development of a national curriculum and general standards. It established the rules and regulations related to teacher recruitment, student admission and examinations, and so on. Around ten per

<sup>103</sup> Examples: Teachers got higher salaries than other civil servants with similar length of education; they were next to automatically promoted based on a certain scale; they could be freed from the compulsory military service if they stayed on in teaching; the Teachers’ day was a national day and celebrated annually; and, teachers got a special medal for long service (Samady, 2001).

<sup>104</sup> The current two-year pre-service teacher training programmes offer 2,304 hours of study, out of which only 12 involve “practice teaching” (Ministry of Education, 2006)

<sup>105</sup> Majrooh, a government member and ambassador in the 1950s and 1960s, considered school reform and establishment of an official judicial system of equally great importance in the Constitution of 1964. *Qadis* (judges) were introduced as government employees of official tribunals. “The *madrasas* ... declined and the *maulvis* ceased fulfilling the duties of a local judge” (p. 145), which paved the way for a modern society (Majrooh, 1986).

cent of the national budget was allotted to the development of education in the 1960s and 1970s (ibid.).

In the seven-year plan of 1976 a new educational reform was planned in which education was to respond to the needs of the anticipated industrialisation of the country. Eight years of basic, compulsory education with alternative options in secondary schools as well as expansion of vocational education were planned (Ministry of Planning, 1975). However, not much materialised after the Communist seizure of power in 1978 and the subsequent turmoil.

## Progress halted

With Soviet support the Communist regime remained in power until 1992 but it had, almost from start, very little control outside the cities. Nevertheless, the communists tried to introduce a socialist educational system without Islamic influences. The “Fundamental Principles of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan”, adopted in 1980, clearly reflect how education was considered an important instrument for promoting a communist ideology (Samady, 2001). Soviet experts and advisers were plentiful in the now two ministries of education. With the Soviet curriculum as a model, science and mathematics were emphasised and practical work was compulsory. Elmi, a Professor at the Department of Islamic History and Art at Kabul University in the 1960s and 1970s, described the situation this way:

[N]ew subjects were introduced. All textbooks were rewritten by Soviet advisers. History would present a dialectical materialistic view of history. Geography would emphasise more study of Russia, the Soviet block and Cuba. A new course of politics became obligatory ...[also] in secondary schools (Elmi, 1986, p. 90).

Russian became the main foreign language to study in schools and universities (ibid.). Only teachers affiliated with the Communist parties<sup>106</sup> were employed. Girls' education was much encouraged. The posters spread throughout the country depicting girls dressed in short skirts, red neck-scarves and clenched fists were hardly cherished by the Afghans, particularly not by people in rural areas. Parents withdrew their children from *maktabs*, first the girls and then the boys. Generally, the educational system stagnated and by 1983 the Communist regime's foreign minister complained in a meeting at UN that war atrocities had destroyed 50 per cent of the schools (Elmi, 1986). The overall situation deteriorated during the 1980s as indicated in Table 9.4.

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<sup>106</sup> There were two Communist parties in Afghanistan at the time: *Khalk* (The People) and *Parcham* (The Flag).

**Table 9.4: Primary education with government support 1978 and 1990**

	<b>1978</b>	<b>1990</b>
<b>Boy students</b>	843,000	414,200
<b>Girl students</b>	152,800	214,600
<b>Schools</b>	3,400	600
<b>Male teachers</b>	24,800	7,700
<b>Female teachers</b>	5,100	8,900

Source: Samady 2001

The destruction of the educational infrastructure was enormous, particularly in the villages of rural areas. Of 3,400 primary schools in 1978 fewer than 600 remained in 1990. More than 2,000 school buildings had been destroyed. The number of boy students decreased with more than half while the number of girls increased. The number of male teachers declined drastically with more than two thirds but the number of female teachers increased. Boys, at least from teen age, escaped the educational authorities and did not register in schools in order to avoid military service. Many joined the *Mujaheddin* groups. Male teachers left their profession for the same reason. Most of the girl students and their female teachers were in Kabul or in some of the other cities that were not hit by war atrocities during this period. Some 75 per cent of the female teachers were working in Kabul (Samady, 2001). The resistance against the Communist curriculum was generally weaker in urban environments, which is another likely reason for the increase in urban girl students.

In the liberated rural areas, *Mujaheddin* initiated educational activities sometimes with support from international NGOs. *Maktabas* appeared in many places, including quite a few schools for girls. These girl schools were the first ever in many places. The Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, University of Nebraska (UNO) and Muslim Aid were the main actors. In 1988, 1,500 schools with around 180,000 primary school students got financial and technical support. Among the leadership of the *Mujaheddin* groups and in the Islamist movement generally, there were many teachers and students from institutions of higher education. *Mujaheddin* soldiers acted as teachers or teacher trainers during periods of low intensity fighting. The Quran and Islamic subjects played an important role in the primary school teaching.

In the refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran educational facilities were provided too. One calculation, which may be too optimistic, is provided by Samady (2001) who estimates that 25 to 30 per cent of the refugee children had access to primary education.

## New hopes dashed

When the Communist government collapsed and was replaced in 1992 by the government of *Mujaheddin* a new curriculum was developed for primary education. It dedicated around 30 per cent of the hours to studies of the Quran and Islamic subjects. The *Mujaheddin* government (1992-96) planned to establish 30 government *madrasas*, one in each province, but these schools were never realised.

Instead the continuation of the war after 1992 caused yet a further collapse of most educational institutions. Now the war spread to the cities and forced big urban schools to cease teaching. The city population, particularly the Kabulis, left their homes *en masse* to join the millions of rural refugees, either to relatives in calm rural parts of the country or to Pakistani camps. Girls' education was severely hit during this period and the total number of girl students decreased. In rural areas the *maktabs* often continued to function (to the extent they existed) and in some areas even experienced an upswing, especially with regards to girl schools. Young women from Kabul and other cities were contracted as teachers for the rural girls. However, the total number of both male and female teachers decreased considerably during these four years. After 1978, 20,000 male teachers left their jobs. They died, fled, emigrated or 'disappeared'. Only 4,900 remained in duty in 1994 (Samady, 2001).

**Table 9.5: Primary education with government support 1990 and 1994**

	1990	1994
<b>Boy students</b>	414,200	459,800
<b>Girl students</b>	214,600	168,800
<b>Schools</b>	600	?
<b>Male teachers</b>	7,700	4,900
<b>Female teachers</b>	8,900	6,700

Source: Samady 2001

## Taliban education

With the *Taliban* in power, the war atrocities ceased in major parts of the country. The *Taliban* government's interest in education was fairly weak and mainly, at least initially, focused on Islamic education in *madrasas*. After some years, they also made an attempt to change *maktab* education. Girl schools were officially closed, which severely affected the girls in the cities. In rural areas, however, by keeping a low profile girls' education continued at the primary level, usually, but not always, in home

schools. The schools got most of their support from NGOs but also local communities financed girl classes. Female teachers, often from the cities, taught in these schools. However, the total enrolment rate for girls continued to decrease during the 1990s as an effect of the closure of city girl schools. The female teachers in cities were not allowed to work (but still received their salaries during the first years of the *Taliban* regime). This was a serious calamity not only for girls but also for boys since many of their teachers were women.

During this period, it is estimated that only 10 to 15 per cent of primary school aged children had access to *maktab* education (Rugh, 1998). The SCA provided at least 30 per cent of the total education offered (Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, 2000). In 2000, SCA was almost the only NGO in the education sector and supported almost 600 schools (in rural areas only) with 170,000 students of which 21 per cent were girls (Samady, 2001)<sup>107</sup>.

## University education

Kabul University was founded in 1932 with the establishment of the School of Medicine<sup>108</sup>. Gradually, the Faculty of Law, the Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Letters were established (Samady, 2001). In 1950, a total of 456 students were registered, including 40 women in five institutions (ibid, p. 64). Women's Faculty with scientific and literary departments was initiated at Kabul University in 1947 but was later integrated into the mainstream faculties. Co-education was introduced in 1960 at higher educational institutions. In 1963, new buildings on a large campus were constructed for Kabul University. During the 1960s, departments of Political Science, Natural Science, Economy, Pharmacy, Agriculture, Education, Languages (Arabic, French, English, German, and from the 1980s, Russian), Law and *Shariat* were established. These departments were supported by France, Turkey, Germany, the USA, Egypt and, from the 1960s, the Soviet Union<sup>109</sup>. A second university was established in Nangarhar in 1964. The Polytechnic Institute of Kabul was inaugurated in 1967 and, in the same year, the Institute for Industrial Management was established. In 1970, 50 per cent of the 6,000 students studied at the medicine and engineering faculties. The universities faced the same reduction of students and teachers from 1978 as other educational institutions. However, three additional universities (in Balkh, Herat and Kandahar) opened in 1980. Universities lacked buildings, facilities, equipment, books, laboratories, and staff. The quality declined far below accepted standards from the

<sup>107</sup> According to SCA reports, 22.7 per cent were girls in 2000, 23 per cent in 2001 and 26 per cent in 2002 (Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, 2002).

<sup>108</sup> The School of Medicine was established with support of Turkey. Previously, the few Afghan doctors had been trained abroad. In 1937, the first group of eight doctors graduated in Kabul (Samady, 2001)

<sup>109</sup> Also Sweden, through Karlstad University, was involved in Kabul University.



1980s and onwards (Samady, 2001).

The majority of students were (and still are) trained to become teachers of secondary schools. Each department was patterned after its main supporting country, which impeded the development of a national and cohesive higher education system (Olesen, 1995). Besides the MD for doctors, only studies up to BA and BSc levels were possible at Afghan universities.

Elmi (1986) has described the situation at the universities from the mid 1960s. In particular he looked at the Polytechnic Institute a department of the University, which opened in 1967. From the start, all heads and main teachers were Russian. By 1980, all professors and teachers had been replaced by members of the Communist party, whether or not they had the required qualifications. The Russian occupation had devastating effects on the universities. The Afghan staff of Kabul University had decreased by half already in 1980. The majority had emigrated but a great number was executed or perished in jails. Elmi lists the names of teachers who were executed, put to jail, 'disappeared' or emigrated. The list requires several pages. Students also suffered immensely: "Hundreds of university students were abducted and summarily executed, and ... the total number of students was reduced in 1984 from 14,000 to 6,000. A majority of those left were girl students..." (p. 81). Some 12,000 students were sent to study in the Soviet Union, many never to return (Elmi, 1986). In 1990 the Kabul University student body was 60 per cent female (Samady, 2001).

## After 2001

It was estimated that less than 20 per cent of all school-aged children had access to school in 2001 (with a primary school age population of more than four million children). In June 2002, education was proclaimed a national priority and the international donor community initiated assistance. Eventually, a huge expansion of education took place<sup>110</sup>. There is no accurate data of net enrolment; instead school attendance rates are used as a proxy indicator in the available information. Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) was calculated as 54 per cent in grades 1 – 6 in 2005 with boys' NER estimated at 66 - 67 per cent and girls' NER varying among documents between 34 per cent and 42 per cent (Government of Afghanistan, 2004; Ministry of Education, 2005a; UNICEF 2005a). According to the Ministry of Education, in 2005 there were 5.2 million children (in grades 1 – 12) enrolled and accommodated in 8,379 schools, of which 1,399 were girl and 6,980 were boy schools (Ministry of Education, 2005a)<sup>111</sup>. Six million students

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<sup>110</sup> The following data cannot be considered fully accurate and different information is provided by different sources. The figures vary also in official documents.

<sup>111</sup> A year later, the drafted document on a plan for education 2006-2011 reported 4.9 million children in 2005 (Ministry of Education, 2006).

were expected by the start of the new school year in March 2006<sup>112</sup> (ibid.).

It is estimated that 20 per cent of the total population in Afghanistan is of primary school age, that is, 7 to 12 years old (Government of Afghanistan, 2005). If this is correct it implies the highest proportion of this age group to total national population in the world. Afghanistan has around eight million children aged 7 to 18 (UNICEF, 2005b). An additional five million children below the age of seven would make a total of 13 million children below the age of 18. According to this estimation, there are three million children who still are not enrolled in schools. Of these, probably two million are girls.

Thirty-four per cent of all students are girls, which implies that there are almost twice as many boys as girls in the schools. It is estimated that around eight million children are of school age. If four million of these are girls, there are some 2.5 million girls who do not attend school. This would mean 2.5 times as many girls as boys are not in school. There are other forms of education for girls, for example, accelerated learning classes<sup>113</sup> (six years of primary education are studied in two-three years), adult literacy classes, home-based classes, and girl *madrasas* but they can only to a very limited extent fill the gap. Thus it is obvious that the *Taliban* ban was not the only or even the main obstacle for girls' participation in education in rural areas. This is also evident by the fact that the gender gap in primary enrolment has remained constant.

In 2005, almost three quarters of all students were enrolled in grades 1 – 4. Starting with grade five, there was a drastic fall of enrolment (Ministry of Education, 2006). There were nearly twice as many boys as girls at the primary level, three times more at the lower secondary level, and four times more at the higher secondary level. In urban areas, girls are approaching an equal share at the primary level but in urban secondary schools there are still twice as many boys as girls (ibid.). In rural areas, there are less than half as many girls as boys in primary schools and at the secondary level, there are ten times more boys than girls (ibid.).

In 2005, about 84 per cent of all the 34,000 female teachers were working in the nine provinces with relatively big cities. In some provinces there is not a single female teacher employed (Ministry of Education, 2005b). On the national level, female teachers constituted 28 per cent of the teaching force, ranging from one per cent in Uruzgan province to 64 per cent in Kabul province (Ministry of Education, 2006). Only in Kabul did a majority of teachers meet the official qualifications for teachers, that is, completed a teacher training program. Nationally about 50 per cent of the all teachers had completed grade 12 while 30 per cent had even fewer years of education (ibid.). In 2005, around 10,000 teachers were enrolled in teacher training colleges. Of these, 7,000 teachers participated in in-service programmes (ibid.).

<sup>112</sup> 900,000 enrollees to grade one were registered in March 2007 when the new school year started (Personal communication with staff at Ministry of Education).

<sup>113</sup> The Communist regime also introduced "accelerated" or intensive learning. Then out-of-school children (nine to fourteen years of age) could attend a two-year course, after which they were allowed to enroll in grade five (Samady, 2001)

Table 9.6: Students, schools<sup>114</sup> and teachers in Afghanistan, 2005<sup>115</sup>

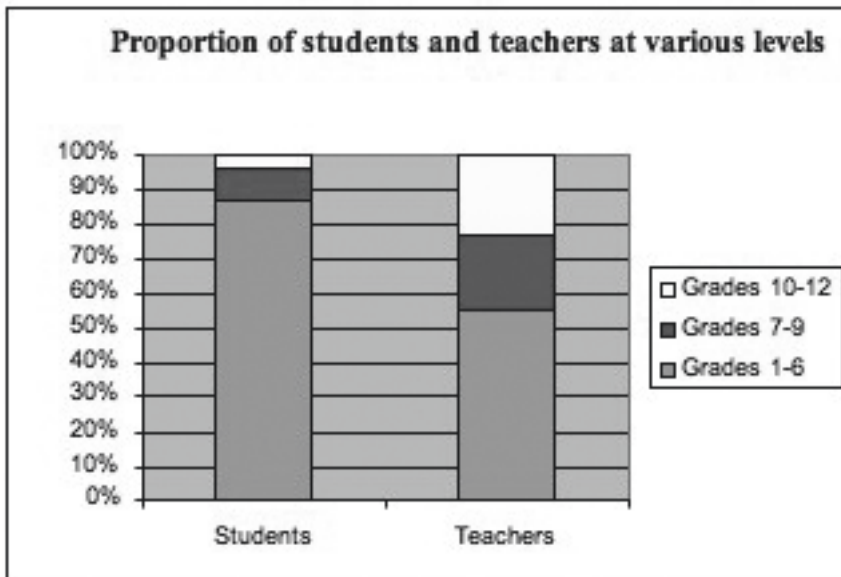
Number of students, schools and teachers at different levels										
	Primary level (grades 1 - 6)			Lower secondary level (grades 7 - 9)			Higher secondary level (grades 10 - 12)			Total
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Students	2959,489	1531,545	4 491,034	363,243	115,256	478,499	149,847	39,038	188,885	5158,418
Schools <sup>1</sup>	4,971	972	5,943	1,137	246	1,383	872	181	1,053	8,379
Teachers	53,040	14,943	67,983	17,608	8,404	26,012	18,154	10,761	28,915	122,910
Percentage of students, schools and teachers at different levels										
	Primary level (grade 1 – 6)			Lower secondary level (grade 7 - 9)			Higher secondary level (grade 10 - 12)			Per cent of total
	Male	Female	Share of total	Male	Female	Share of total	Male	Female	Share of total	
	66	34	87	76	24	9	79	21	4	33
Schools	84	16	71	82	18	17	83	17	13	17
Teachers	78	22	55	68	32	21	63	37	24	28

Source: Adapted from Ministry of Education, 2005b.

<sup>114</sup> Only boy and girl schools are reported although quite a number of co-educated primary schools exist.

<sup>115</sup> Although precise, these data are uncertain. Another official source suggests, for example, that 150,000 teachers and additionally, 30,000 staff in administrative and other categories were employed by Ministry of Education in all its programs. A teacher registration survey was planned in 2006 (Ministry of Education, 2006)

Some 55 per cent of the teachers taught 87 per cent of all students. These were the students in grades 1 through 6. Meanwhile 24 per cent of the teaching force was working with only four per cent of the students: those at the higher secondary levels. This implies that the teacher – student ratio at primary level was 1:66 while at the higher secondary level it was 1:7. Teachers are distributed in accordance to a system that favours more teachers per class from grade 4 and upward. This is due to the fact that more subjects are added in each grade and teachers normally teach only one or two subjects. As the number of students in grades 1 – 3 is considerably higher than in the subsequent grades, thus resulting in the teacher-student ratios noted above.



**Figure 9.1: Proportion of students and teachers in primary, lower secondary and higher secondary levels (percentage).**

The system results in overcrowded classes in the lower grades, which may be a cause of the high drop out at primary level. There is no accurate information about drop out and repetition rates. The Department of Planning at Ministry of Education assumes a drop out rate of 15 - 20 per cent annually. In the Millennium Report the primary school completion rate is estimated at 45 per cent (Government of Afghanistan 2005). “For boys it is 56 % and for girls 30 %. This means that of all the boys and girls who enrolled in Grade 1, slightly more than half the boys and only about one-third girls complete

5 years of education in the allocated time” (ibid. p 7). It is unfortunately common for official documents to disseminate different information. Another, more recent study of the drop out rates reports that on average 22 per cent of the registered students drop out at the end of the school year. This figure is the accumulated number of permanently absent (three years) students and implies an annual drop out rate of seven to eight per cent (Mansory 2007a). Whatever rate may be accurate, drop out is a huge problem (confirmed also by the present study, see *Chapter 12 Maktab and Madrasa*). Due to a complicated set of rules that regulate absence and presence, it is difficult to calculate the correct drop out rate. The Ministry of Education estimated that almost half a million students who were registered in 2005 actually had dropped out of school before the school year ended (Ministry of Education, 2006).

Thirteen per cent of all students studied above grade six in 2005. Historically, Afghanistan has always had very few secondary schools. In particular since the 1990s, the proportion of secondary to primary schools has been very low, a fact with implications not least for recruitment of teachers. However, in many of the refugee camps, Afghan children, girls as well as boys, had relatively good access to education at both the primary and secondary level. In 2006 secondary schools were still unevenly distributed in the country. In some provinces with large populations there are only two to three secondary schools (for example in Zabul, Nuristan, and Paktika) while in Kabul and other provinces with cities students faced no problems if they wanted to further their studies. This situation also effects tertiary level education. For example, in 2006 more than 43,000 students participated in the university admission examinations and of these only 43 boy students were from Paktika and eight from Zabul (Ministry of Higher Education, 2006). Very little attention has been paid to secondary level education by the international donor community. Support by the Ministry of Education has mainly consisted of salaries to school staff. The quality of textbooks and training of teachers, for example, have not been on the agenda.

There were seven universities in the country in 2005 and almost all included education faculties. In 2006, out of around 53,000 graduates of secondary schools only some 10,000 could be accommodated in higher education institutions. The competition for admission will get harder every year as more and more students complete secondary education and apply to university. Consequently, an increasing number of students will have to accept that their education will end with grade 12 unless opportunities for higher education expand considerably. Opportunities for vocational training have so far been extremely limited.

In 2006, the majority of schools had no proper school building. The schools with buildings cannot house all children in classrooms. Many classes were taught in tents, in mosques, in private houses or in the open air under the shadow of trees, if available. On the whole, only 20 per cent of schools had access to water and even fewer had toilets or latrines (Ministry of Education, 2006). Many schools worked in two or even three shifts. Shifts are sometimes separate for boys and girls and for lower and higher

grades so that, for example, grades 1 to 3 are taught in the mornings and grades 4 to 6 in the afternoons. When schools, particularly in urban areas, teach in double or triple shifts, the result is that many students do not get the stipulated amount of instruction (ibid). In rural areas, the primary school is usually located in a central village (often where there was a school in the 1970s) and children from surrounding villages have to walk, sometimes up to six km or more, to get to the school. A long distance to school is mentioned as one of the reasons for girls' low enrolment (see *Chapter 14 Girls' Education: Obligation and Separation*). Needless to say, the distance is shorter in densely populated areas but longer in sparsely populated rural areas. It is projected that 2,000 schools have to be constructed every year over a three year period from 2006 (ibid.).

There are several ministries involved in education in Afghanistan. The Ministry of Education<sup>116</sup> is responsible for the overall provision of education throughout the country. The Ministry of Higher Education has responsibility for tertiary education including training of teachers for higher secondary education. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is responsible for non-formal, vocational education as well as pre-school education<sup>117</sup> and the Ministry of Pilgrimage and Endowments has the responsibility for Islamic education in mosque schools.

In 2006, there were 42 vocational schools with some 9,000 students; more than half of these were students in Kabul. Of these 900 students were female and all of them studied in Kabul and Herat (ibid.).

It is estimated that around 11 million adult Afghans need literacy training. Literacy programmes have been initiated, mostly in the cities. There is no information available on the number of participants (ibid.).

Increasing unrest, instability and insecurity in some parts of the country caused by *Taliban* resurgence as well as political resistance movements against the so called coalition forces on the one side and the NATO bombings and other war atrocities on the other have again made girls' education more vulnerable. That criminality is on the increase does not improve the situation. Several schools, particularly girl schools have been set on fire at night<sup>118</sup>.

<sup>116</sup> In 2006, the fifth Minister of Education was appointed in four years.

<sup>117</sup> No formal system exists for pre-school children. Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs run some 200 kindergartens for children of government employees (Ministry of Education, 2006).

<sup>118</sup> In 2005, 72 attacks on schools in seven provinces were reported and during the first half of 2006, 73 schools in 26 provinces had been attacked (Ministry of Education, 2006).

## Conflict issues in Afghan educational history

From an educational perspective, three issues have been important in many upheavals and rebellions in Afghanistan throughout modern history: the role of Islam in education; education for girls; and, government control of Islamic education. These issues were disputed already in 1929 when King Amanullah was forced into exile and have, after a relatively calm period thereafter, again become very hot issues starting in the 1970s.

Islam was an important subject from the very beginning of *maktab* education. This fact did not cause much friction until the 1970s when secular subjects expanded at the cost of Islamic teachings. From that time, much more attention was paid to the secular content of *maktab* education and Islamic subjects were, if not directly reduced in the curriculum, dealt with as less important by teachers and planners. The students, “*maktabees*”, represented the new generation that was to contribute to the development of Afghanistan and bring the country into a modern era. The underlying assumption was that religious knowledge was of less importance and out of date. The Communist curriculum further emphasised this development but still did not erase all Islamic subjects. Islam remained a subject for one to two hours per week in the primary school during this period.

The short-lived *Mujaheddin* government introduced a considerable expansion of the time devoted to Islamic subjects in *maktab*. The hours increased to 12 per week in grades 4 through 6. Mostly, the NGOs who supported education in the 1990s adhered to this curriculum. In the *Taliban* primary schools, students spent more than half the time on Islamic subjects.

One of the first measures undertaken by the interim government in 2002 was to considerably reduce the number of hours of Islamic subjects to the same amount as during the Communist period. This caused a lot of opposition and thus has been changed several times. Table 9.7 compares how many hours per week students have studied Islamic subjects in *maktab* during various periods.

**Table 9.7: Hours per week of Islamic subjects during different governments<sup>119</sup>**

	Pre-war Gov:ts 1960-1978		Communist Gov:t 1978-1990		NGOs (SCA) 1984-2001		Taliban Gov:t 1996-2001		Interim Gov:t 2002 -2005		Present Gov:t 2006 -	
	Gr. 1-3	Gr. 4-6	Gr. 1-3	Gr. 4-6	Gr. 1-3	Gr. 4-6	Gr. 1-3	Gr. 4-6	Gr. 1-3	Gr. 4-6	Gr. 1-3	Gr. 4-6
<b>Holy Quran</b>	2	2	1	1	6	6	6	5	1	2	1	2
<b>Islam</b>	2	3	0	1	6	4	5	11	2	2	2	2
<b>Total</b>	4	5	1	2	12	10	11	16	3	4	3	4

Source: Adapted from Karlsson & Mansory (2004)

*Maktab* education was, as mentioned, introduced fairly late in Afghanistan and the first schools were established to serve the needs of the army, the growing administration and to promote a general modernisation of the country. Education was required for new professionals, and only men had ever held professional positions in the country. There was no felt need to educate girls, who should marry and take care of the home and children. The first school for girls was intended for the daughters of the urban elite who were close to the royal family. It is doubtful whether their education was ever intended to lead to a professional job (although a small group of young women were sent to Turkey to become nurses).

The first generation of school girls were dressed in a way that did not correspond to what was generally considered to be in accordance with the Islamic dress code. Thus it was not hard for the belief to arise that *maktab* education as such was counter to Islamic values. Those who advocated for girls' education moved too hastily and probably did not have enough contact with the beliefs and values that dominated the majority of the population at that time. As a result girls' education faced its first backlash by the end of the 1920s.

During the following decades, girl schools were restarted at a very slow pace. Boys' education expanded very slowly as well. From the 1950s, girls' education grew, slowly, and initially mostly in urban areas. It became increasingly accepted that girls and women were needed in the pedagogical and medical professions since the gender separation required female teachers for girls and female doctors for women. By the end of the 1970s, girls constituted around one third of all students. Rural girl students were still, however,

<sup>119</sup> The hours for 2006 are according to the official curriculum but many schools replace the hours dedicated for drawing or sports with more teaching in Islamic subjects. Some schools add extra lessons. Others claim that they have been advised by provincial directors (representatives of Ministry of Education) to add one more hour of Islam at the cost of one hour calligraphy (Personal communication with headmasters).



few. In the 1980s the number of girl students outnumbered the boys in city schools (the only schools with government support) and in rural areas girls became pupils to an extent that had never occurred before. Contrary to what is generally described, the *Mujaheddin* movements, whose members often were Islamist modernists, generally favoured girls' education. With international financial support (sometimes also conditioned) girl schools were established in *Mujaheddin* controlled rural areas. This development continued during the *Taliban* ban on girls' education: the number of rural girl schools increased continuously during these years. City girls, however, were totally excluded from education with the exception of those who could participate in some clandestine home schools. The *Taliban* believed that only (limited) Islamic education was required and that women did not need education at all. However, the *Taliban* movement was not homogenous in their view of education. In rural areas girls' education was often accepted and women were allowed to teach.

After the fall of the *Taliban* regime, girls have returned to schools in the cities and rural schools have also had an increase of girl students. Still in 2005, however, girls constitute only 33 per cent of all students and a majority of the girls are still urban dwellers (Ministry of Education, 2005b). As described earlier in this chapter and in *Chapter 3 Education and Knowledge in Islam*, Islamic education has often included a large portion of non-religious subjects, particularly when Islamic societies were at their height. When *maktab* education was first introduced in Afghanistan, it built upon the experience and on the content of Islamic schools and only gradually incorporated the typical features of Western type of education. From the 1920s, *maktab* and *madrasa* have represented two educational systems, which have often been regarded as contradictory systems and looked upon with suspicion by the ruling classes as well as by the rural masses. When governments have put their efforts on educational development, they have focussed only on *maktab* education. When the state has paid attention to *madrasas*, the reason has not been to improve or expand them but rather to control and supervise the traditionally, community based Islamic schools<sup>120</sup>.

King Amanullah was the first to establish government *madrasas* and he was followed by later governments, with the exception of the Communist regime. In 2006, the Ministry of Education sensed "a need for broad-based consultations on the goals for Islamic education and the knowledge, skills and attitudes that students should learn in the *Madrasas*". A "new syllabi and textbooks ... to be re-designed" are anticipated (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 18). "Some religious leaders do not support this change, so it is vital that the Ministry of Education is able to obtain their support with regards to the curriculum and the overall system of Islamic education" (ibid. p. 19). It seems as if the Ministry of Education anticipates some opposition.

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<sup>120</sup> During the *Taliban* government, the big *madrasa* in Ghazni protected its independence and rejected government support.

**Table 9.8: Conflict issues in Afghan educational history<sup>121</sup>**

	Islam in <i>maktab</i>	Girls in <i>maktab</i>	Control of <i>madrasa</i>
<b>1920s</b>	<i>Maktab</i> curriculum based on <i>madrasa</i> .	First girl school started in 1921. Closed in 1929.	Community <i>madrasas</i> all over the country. Two government <i>madrasas</i> in Kabul.
<b>1930s–1940s</b>	No change.	Very few girl schools restarted.	No change.
<b>1950s–1960s</b>	Secular education in focus as a means for modernisation.	Slow expansion, mainly in cities.	Community <i>madrasas</i> continued. Gradual government take over of seven city <i>madrasas</i> .
<b>1970s</b>	Decreased hours.	Big expansion in cities. A few schools in rural areas.	Community <i>madrasas</i> and nine government <i>madrasas</i> continued up to 1978.
<b>1980s</b>	In public <i>maktab</i> : decreased hours. In <i>Mujaheddin maktab</i> : increased hours. In refugee schools: increased hours	Public girl schools in cities. <i>Mujaheddin</i> girl schools in rural areas. Girl schools in refugee camps	Community <i>madrasas</i> attacked, and expropriated; many continued (with a low profile). Nine government <i>madrasas</i> dysfunctional but existing. <i>Mujaheddin madrasas</i> with formal structure. <i>Wahabi madrasas</i> supported by Arabs. <i>Madrasas</i> in refugee camps.
<b>1990s</b>	NGO schools with <i>Mujaheddin</i> curriculum. <i>Taliban</i> schools = <i>madrasas</i> with secular subjects.	NGO girl schools in rural areas. <i>Taliban</i> ban on girl schools (mainly in cities).	Community <i>madrasas</i> revived, some supported by the <i>Taliban</i> government. Nine government <i>madrasas</i> revived.
<b>2000s</b>	In 2002 decreased to the level of the 1970s. Increased in 2006.	Back to school campaign resulted in girl schools all over the country – still low enrolment in rural areas. High drop out after grade 3.	Community <i>madrasas</i> closed down, still on the decline. 300 government <i>madrasas</i> (grades 7 – 12) planned. 200 existed in 2006.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Afghanistan has, on one side, a long history and rich experience of Islamic education and, on the other side, a fairly short record of Western type of education. In both systems girls and women have been excluded to a large extent. Islamic education has been neglected by the state as well as by religious organisations, which has resulted in the present stagnation. It is, however, still held in high esteem by the population. Practically one hundred per cent of all children attend mosque schools. The state has made several attempts to control Islamic schools, the *madrasas*. Western type of education was introduced without considering Afghan traditions and has at times been resisted, particularly when authorities tried to also make students of girls. The role of Islam as a subject in Western type of education has been a recurrent theme of various curricula. The conflict between the two systems remains today. However, the two systems could have quite a lot to gain from each other's experience.

In 2010, the population in Afghanistan is estimated to have increased to 35 million people. It is an enormous challenge for the country to match the expansion of the school system with its population growth.

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<sup>121</sup> Girl students have constituted around 30 – 35 per cent of all enrolled primary school students since the 1970s, during the Communist period in the 1980s, in the NGO supported schools in the 1990s and still, in the government schools in 2006. (Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, 1999, Government of Afghanistan, 2004).

## Chapter ten

# Afghanistan and Globalisation

After 30 years of war atrocities, forced migration, fragmentation of the country and “a failed state”, Afghanistan was like an open field, a void that was easy to fill by the powers. The foreign forces who hastily invaded the country, not only with military strength but also equipped with cultural ideas and economic power. The “carriers of globalisation” (Stromquist, 2002), international bodies like the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, UN agencies, government donors, NGOs and private companies from the North and to some extent from the neighbouring countries have, together with other globalisation forces, affected the country in a number of ways over the last few years. The influence has primarily been of a political and cultural (including education) character rather than an economic one so far. Transnational companies have, as yet, found it worthwhile to invest in Afghanistan only to a limited extent. The infrastructure conditions are still extremely poor and it will take many years to raise the education level to serviceable standards. The country’s economy still relies to a large extent on subsistence agriculture. The development plans are, however, strongly influenced by the world models.

Globalisation is visible technologically and culturally, particularly in the cities. After 30 years of isolation, the changes - from a Kabul perspective - appear extremely sudden and immediate, while from the outlook of a rural village not much has altered. But change is imminent, as media, particularly television, the international NGOs and firms and the UN agencies are rapidly contributing to breaking the rural isolation. Gradually, village life is changing its course too. Globalisation trends are maybe most evident in education with the changes, including Islamic education, affecting people all over the country. The reconstruction of the Afghan state and its institutions has been and still is heavily dependent on the international aid community, especially on the USAID. The room for manoeuvre is fairly limited for the national state. Through international aid, global models are being imposed on Afghanistan.

This chapter illustrates the effects of globalisation in Afghanistan. The first part briefly describes globalisation in the country from political, economic, technological, cultural and religious aspects. The second and larger part includes an account of the effects of globalisation in education.

## A general overview

### Politically

Hettne's remark (2002) about decisions made elsewhere and by others than the legitimate state perfectly describes the Afghan situation. When loans and contributions from international aid organisations cover 90 per cent of the annual budget, the dependency is strong. When much of the country's security is controlled by foreign troops, the sovereignty of the state is restricted. When states on a global scale have lost their regulating, financing and educating role and engage more and more in supervision, monitoring and evaluation, they have very small possibilities to rule proactively, let alone retroactively. This reflects the nature of Afghan governance, in its present state of affairs, brought about by a sequence of events over which they had not much control.

On October 7, 2001 US fighting started in Afghanistan with the main aim to catch Usama bin Laden, allegedly responsible for the attack on the Washington towers four weeks earlier (six years later bin Laden is not captured and the US attacks continue). In December 2001, the UN mediated a conference in Bonn with representatives of a number of countries and some 200 Afghans, randomly selected by the UN to represent the Afghan people. The meeting's decisions included the installation of an interim government, approval of the International Security Armed Forces (ISAF), and the disarmament of all warring factions in Afghanistan<sup>122</sup>. Elections, a new constitution, a human rights commission, pledges of international aid and incentives for refugees to return were among other measures. However, a reconciliation commission, similar to the model used in South Africa, was never on the agenda. Many Afghans had expected such a commission and regarded it as necessary after 25 years of war on Afghan soil. Instead, new power constellations continued the struggle with non-violent as well as violent methods. A few days after the Bonn conference, an Afghan government and president Karzai were in place.

A liberal form of a democracy was intended for Afghanistan but traditional structures were allowed too. Loya Jirgas were summoned twice in 2002: first to legitimise the President and then to approve the new constitution. The constitution raised concerns, for example, some disliked that Afghanistan was declared an Islamic state, and others thought that the constitution failed to protect the rights of women (Amnesty International, 2004). Only a few questioned the fact that large parts of the constitution resemble the American constitution, including a powerful presidency.

The elections in 2004 and 2005 were strongly controlled by local warlords and their militia (Human Rights Watch, 2004; Wilder, 2005). While the presidential election

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<sup>122</sup> The Government claims that 60,000 former combatants have been demobilised in 2006 (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2005).

attracted some 70 - 80 per cent of the voters, only 50 per cent voted for the National Assembly. In Kabul only 34 per cent of the voters participated and the competition for votes involved both threats and money (Wilder, 2005). The president was elected for another six years and 350 members (individuals, not party representatives since a party system does not exist) were elected for a period of four years. 25 per cent of the members in the parliament are women (a considerable proportion that most Western countries cannot demonstrate<sup>123</sup>). Under the constitution, two women per province is mandated although 30 per cent of the elected women won in their own right. Further, one third of the 102 senate or upper house members are appointed directly by the president. There is no prime minister to lead the government, which had been the custom previously and which is common in most countries. In Afghanistan the president heads the government. More than half of the cabinet members have, in addition to Afghan citizenship, a foreign residency of which 60 per cent is American.-

Provincial councils were also elected in 2005 and further decentralisation of state power is planned (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2006a; Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2006b). Reforms to public administrative structures, including the provincial governor's offices, are planned but roles, relationships, responsibilities and resources are not clear. This makes the international aid community impatient as "the effectiveness of provincial structures is impeded by a lack of clarity and consensus" (Lister & Nixon, 2006, p.14). The viewpoint of many Afghans is that the previously "failed state" requires re-centralisation rather than decentralisation in order to strengthen the centre and counterattack the fragmentation of the country (Karlsson & Mansory, 2004). Lately, the Afghan administration has often and increasingly been accused for nepotism, lack of transparency and corruption.

ISAF was on patrol at an early stage, and under NATO command from 2003. The Afghan army and police, trained by US forces, are slowly expanding; however they are often accused of corruption. Disarming campaigns have had limited success, the violence is steadily increasing and old warlords have returned with private armies which collectively outnumber the national one<sup>124</sup>. Many places experience a *Taliban* resurrection and armed resistance from other sides afflict the civilian population in many parts of the country – in addition to the American bombings. All told, the security situation in 2007 is much worse than in 2001.

On the positive side, the Independent Human Rights Commission, secured in the constitution and backed up by international aid, seems to be fairly independent. It aims at "enhancing respect for human rights ... through investigation, recording and publication of the truth and through the establishment of accountability for the past crimes such as crime against humanity and gross violations of human rights in

<sup>123</sup> The US Congress, for example, has 15 per cent women.

<sup>124</sup> Instead of disarmament, some militia groups have been transformed into private security companies. Recently one such company, previously affiliated to a notorious warlord, was again disarmed due to involvement in illegal activities, including an attempt to kidnap the head attorney of the Supreme Court (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/pashto/index.shtml>).

accordance with international law, Islamic principles, Afghan tradition and the will of the people of Afghanistan” (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2007). The Commission has special units for women’s and children’s rights. Interestingly however, no case has been heard to date.

The tie between financial aid and political influence is strong. The financial support from the international community has been implemented to around 50 per cent. Not only international organisations like the World Bank and UN have a strong influence on the state, also international NGOs and profit-driven companies have a say in various policy issues. The Community Based Schools (CBSs), for example, supported by NGOs, constitute a parallel education system over which the Government does not have much control.

“Civil society” is a globalised concept now introduced also in Afghanistan, although it is worth noting that the phenomenon existed long before it was labelled. Societal functions were and still are performed by voluntary civic and social organisations and institutions<sup>125</sup>, many of which have an Islamic origin. Of recent origin is the National Solidarity Programme financed (around 400 USD million annually) by a consortium of donors and coordinated by the World Bank. It implements development projects in many parts of the country through some 25 international NGOs and via Community Development Councils set up in each involved village. The programme aims at “developing skills in participation, consensus-building, accounting, procurement and contract management, operations and maintenance, and monitoring” (National Solidarity Programme, 2007). More than 22,000 projects (water supplies, education, transport, electricity, etc.) have been implemented in some 16,000 communities (ibid.).

## Economy

The Government has declared that “our economic vision [is] to build a liberal market economy [and] to do this we will develop an enabling environment for the private sector [via e.g.] sale of public land ...divestment of state owned enterprises [and] significant direct foreign investment” into the mining sector<sup>126</sup> (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2005, p. 11-12). For the Afghans, this means embarking upon a new road. Previously, industrial companies, mines, road construction and other large enterprises were public affairs. The state played a major role in development plans, elaborated before the wars with regards to the economic development, particularly in big

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<sup>125</sup> For example, Islamic charity, the *waqf* (endowment) institution; the *jirga* institution; community based *madrasas*; collection of *zakat* (alms) for distribution to needy people; and, the *awmir* institution for distribution of irrigation water.

<sup>126</sup> This plan seems to counteract what is said in the constitution: “Mines and other underground resources and cultural heritages are the properties of the state” (The Constitution of Afghanistan, 2004, Art 9).

industrial and waterpower projects. Further, state owned farms did not exist, market business was privatised and a planned economy was never considered. According to the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS), the current government is committed to the privatisation agenda. It plans to sell out the state-owned enterprises, which might render almost 15,000 current employees jobless. Needless to say, this privatisation agenda is questioned and may be like “putting the economic reform cart before the horse” (Paterson, 2007).

The goals of the Afghan government are articulated as the Afghanistan Millennium Development Goals. Differing to the UN MDGs, in the Afghan version the time frame has been prolonged from 2015 to 2020, and there is an additional goal referring to enhanced security, to be achieved by training a police force and national army. To achieve the Millennium Goals the Afghanistan Compact was released at a conference in London in the beginning of 2006. It “commits the Afghan Government to realizing a shared vision [and the] international community ...to provide resources and support ...to realize that vision” (Ministry of Finance, 2006, p. 6). The Compact identifies three “critical pillars”: a) security; b) governance, rule of law and human rights; and c) economic and social development.

The budgets issued from 2005 and onwards allocate considerable funds to the promotion of a private sector in industrial activities. It remains to be seen though, from where the investment capital will come. So far, most TNCs have been fairly absent in Afghanistan. The economic growth is expected to be around 10 per cent a year according to IMF (Ministry of Finance, 2006). Infrastructure has been improved and buildings constructed, mainly by and for private interests. “Ostentatious” is, for example, the new storehouse in Kabul built almost entirely of glass. The contrast is immense to the surroundings: lack of water and sanitation, no sewage system, no garbage collection, random electricity supplies, etc.

Since the state relies on the international aid community, a situation of “governance from distance” is prevailing (Hettne, 2002), which is particularly evident as regards the national budget. The financial contributions by the international community strongly dominate the economic plans and the state budget. The budget for 2006 (1385) (5,160 million USD) provides an example: Only ten per cent of the budget consists of internal revenues sufficient to cover salary costs for public employees only. Hence 90 per cent of the budget is comprised of contributions and loans from donor organisations, mainly through multilateral agreements with the World Bank and others.

The total state budget has three parts; a) the operational budget; b) the development budget, and c) the external development (or only external budget, funded by USAID, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the EU). The first part, the operational budget, is the smallest (16 per cent)<sup>127</sup>, and the development budget (27 per cent) contains a number of projects in various areas which are agreed upon by the

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<sup>127</sup> In 2005, 95 per cent of the allocated budget was spent (Ministry of Finance, 2006).



different donors and the Government.<sup>128</sup> Together, the operational and the development budget are called the core budget, of which 47 per cent is directed to infrastructure and natural resources projects, 25 per cent to agriculture and rural development projects and seven per cent to education. However for 57 percent of the total budget “complete information is currently not available” (Ministry of Finance, 2006, p. 9). It is financed by international donors who determine its use without the government’s involvement. Projects are implemented with no participation of public authorities and the government is often not aware of which projects are run where (*ibid.*).

The 2006 budget provides an example of marginalisation and dependency of the state. In a poor country like Afghanistan, the state has not the capacity to mediate between the global and the national/local (Daun, 2002), that is, between supranational bodies like the World Bank and others and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). It has to accept a role of submission. Further, the officials of public administration are not sufficiently competent to meet the standards of an effective and accountable administration. They, as well as the national armed forces, are paid low salaries, often in arrears which, when coupled with high prices for housing and food, have likely contributed to the corruption. This is compounded by the idea that the Afghan currency is undermined by the dominance of the US dollar (Achizad, 2006). An additional complication is that Afghanistan is believed to be the world’s largest producer of opium. Some even consider the country to be a “narco state” where much of “the investment ... arises from the profits generated from the opium trade” (*ibid.*, p. 26).

## Technology

For decades, government institutions had been dysfunctional. As late as in 2001 a visit to any of the ministry buildings in Kabul displayed large sections completely empty. Only a few bureaucrats lingered on here and there. They had almost nothing to do and were seldom, if ever, paid a salary. Since the 1970s government employees were never officially fired so technically they remained on duty and on the payroll. In 2002, many of them returned and claimed their old positions. Several were quite aged and their knowledge was outdated and problematically, the arriving international consultants, the World Bank officials and UN staff required an advanced administration as a counterpart - an equation that could not be solved.

Public offices (also in the provinces where electricity seldom was available) were equipped with computers, servers, software, scanners, printers, etc. but the personnel did not know how to handle the new facilities. Still, in 2007 many of the facilities are not in use, but the young (men), as all over the world, are quick to learn, and computer skills have become a desired commodity on the market. Internet was quickly made available and Internet cafés sprung up in the cities.

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<sup>128</sup> In 2005, 43 per cent of the possible budget had been spent (*ibid.*)

The availability of electricity sets a limit to computer use and Internet access. This technology is mainly obtainable in the big cities and is primarily used professionally by the foreign agencies. The majority of the ministries had no Internet access in the beginning of 2007 and the staff, even the ministers, had non-specific email accounts, usually hotmail or similar addresses.

While Internet access is only for the few, mobile telephones are widely spread. Three or four multinational companies have installed the necessary equipment and large parts of the country are already covered. The isolation many distant rural villages have suffered from is now broken as the improved telecommunications have made it possible to spread news and information, keep in touch with hospitals and police, maintain business contacts, plan for activities and meetings and so forth. These improvements have also benefited illiterate rural people.

## Culture

The *Taliban* ban on music, cinemas, TV and video created a demand that the world was quick to respond to as soon as the old regime was gone. In the beginning of 2007, there were seven national TV channels (six were private) in addition to a number of local ones. There are now several radio stations all over the country, plenty of newspapers and magazines, music to buy on CDs and DVDs, video films to lease or to look at in shop windows. The domestic production is not worth mentioning but Western and Indian producers have flooded the market. Commercials embrace a great deal of time in TV and radio, advertising imported goods and commodities that the great majority of Afghans cannot afford. Obviously, though, there are buyers. At the Internet cafés, young men surf the net and some find pleasure in pornographic films. The rigidly closed doors of the *Taliban* time have now been left wide open, allowing Western consumerist culture and ideology to soak the country. Still, however, with exception of the radio, the technological devices are common only in the cities and in the homes of the few who can afford it. Nevertheless the rapid urbanisation increases the number of people exposed to this aspect of the globalised culture.

Young men and women with a command of English and computer skills are highly sought after by the international agencies to work on various projects. The international NGOs represent values such as rationality, secularism and individualism, which seem to attract some of the young Afghans. There are also several Christian NGOs, which likely have less influence<sup>129</sup>. It is noteworthy that the Afghans, trained in the USA, Canada and England, who have returned are regarded as “hybridised” Afghans and often called ‘American Afghans’. Fluent in English, but with poor knowledge of

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<sup>129</sup> According to the constitution it is allowable to practice religions others than Islam but not to actively proselytise. In a few cases Christian NGOs have distributed Bibles to employees and beneficiaries but no action was taken against them.

Afghan languages, brought up, often born, in settings marked by values mostly alien to those held by the majority of Afghans, they seem eager to modernise their backwards cousins. They are often scorned and regarded with contempt<sup>130</sup> – but also with envy and admiration. The few women who have returned tend to use a headscarf while the men are dressed in Western clothes. One of the first decrees of the government was to order public employees and schoolboys to wear Western clothes when at work or school. Women's dress has not been of concern from above. Shop windows use "white" mannequins dressed *a la* Western fashion but are not worn publicly.

The international interest for women's situation is extremely great. The interest usually takes as point of departure that Western women are "free" and Afghan women are not. The path to walk on for Afghan women is the one that leads to the emancipated situation Western women enjoy<sup>131</sup>. In order to create opinion and to raise awareness, the international community tends to exaggerate and dramatise horrible but rare incidents<sup>132</sup>, which upset the minds in the West but hardly affect the situation of women in Afghanistan<sup>133</sup>. Agencies encourage young city women to engage in professional activities they are not always prepared for or capable of, which sometimes contributes to their losing respect from their male colleagues, instead of the opposite (Personal communication)<sup>134</sup>.

Women's seclusion in Afghanistan is a complicated and sensitive matter. Women's oppression is by male Afghans understood as protection, a view that often is internalised by the women themselves. Islam is commonly used as a shield to "explain" women's limited participation in societal affairs. Since the international agencies sometimes lack understanding and knowledge about Afghan values and traditions, their projects and other activities run the risk to undermine rather than strengthen the situation of Afghan women. An example is how literacy courses for young girls have reduced girls' participation in primary school (see *Chapter 12 Maktab and Madrasa*).

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<sup>130</sup> They are called *sagsho* (dog washers)

<sup>131</sup> Mrs. Laura Bush initiated a project after visiting Kabul some years ago. The project gives the opportunity to a group of women to visit the USA for vacation a couple of months every year.

<sup>132</sup> Stories about women's oppression circulate. For example, about fathers who sell their daughters to the highest bidder; girls who are forced to marry old men; women who are stoned for adultery and fathers who kill their daughters for rejecting an arranged marriage.

<sup>133</sup> Project money is spent on producing fashion magazines and beauty saloons for women when, for example, health clinics and midwife education would be more in parity with the needs of Afghan women. A widely announced project, according to a model from Africa, would provide safe travelling for girls to school in order to avoid sexual harassment and rape. The project closed down for lack of passengers.

<sup>134</sup> In this and all following cases when the reference is 'personal communication', information can be obtained for research purposes.

## Islam

After 9/11, the USA declared war on terrorism and Afghanistan became the first target. “In the highly charged atmosphere ... at the time, no voice was raised to point out that not a single one of the nineteen hijackers was an Afghan, neither was bin Laden an Afghan” (Ahmed, 2003, p. 33). In Afghanistan, *madrasas* closed down, Islamic students kept a low profile and Islamist parties were silent.

When the new government was installed in 2002, one of its first measures was to decrease the number of hours for Islamic subjects in primary schools, a move, which was met with strong opposition from teachers and parents. Teachers worked extra hours voluntarily to teach about Islam. Children increasingly attended the mosque schools and after some time *madrasas* were revived. Gradually, the curriculum has changed and the hours for Islamic subjects have been increased again in the primary schools.

The first article of the constitution of 2004 declares Afghanistan an “Islamic Republic” and Islam to be the official religion of the state. A system of civil law is described but the constitution bars any law “contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam”. There is no explicit reference to Shariah, though, contrary to what was widely reported at the time. In recent policy documents, Afghanistan is described as a country where “moderate Islamic principles” should guide the young people (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 11).

In the context of globalisation two directions of Islamist movements have emerged, the neo-fundamentalists and the modern Islamists. These exist in Afghanistan too, in particular, the neo-*Taliban* movement seems to be on rise. The Islamist parties from the *Mujaheddin* time have developed along various routes, some are strong supporters of the US presence while others oppose it and have been declared terrorists.

In general, there are but few signs of reduced interest for Islam among the mainstream Afghans. Conversely, interest in Islamic education is vibrant, people conduct their daily prayers at work places and in mosques (each Ministry has a mosque for the staff) and *madrasas* for girls have appeared in some places.

The government has declared its interest in Islamic education and has initiated public *madrasas*, that is, Islamic schools with public funding for grades seven to twelve (Ministry of Education, 2006). Discussions concerning the training the mullahs who are teaching in the mosque schools are being held currently. This newly awakened concern may be explained as opportunism or as a sign of extending resistance against the foreign influence. The cabinet members are Muslims, like all Afghans. By coincidence, the international aid community has also become engaged in Islamic education. USAID has financed the construction of two large *madrasas* in the provinces of Paktika and Ghazni at the cost of approximately 1 million USD<sup>135</sup>.

<sup>135</sup> Personal communication.

## Education

### Goals and strategies

The Education for All (EFA) goals are examples of the global pressure for the expansion of education. To reach the goals, Afghanistan has had their time limit extended to the year 2020, five years later than what is prescribed for other countries. The first goal, expansion and improvement of early childhood care and education, implies a new kind of child education for the country. Equitable access and completed primary education for all children, the goals number two and three, imply that all Afghan children have begun school at the latest in 2014. The fourth goal refers to 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy, which today amounts to eleven million people, mostly women. The fifth goal stipulates complete gender equality in education, and the sixth expects a quality education with measurable learning outcomes, achieved by everyone.

In spite of the prolonged time, many of the goals appear out of reach for Afghanistan, in particular the first goal: hardly any child care institutions exist as yet and the goal may seem not only unrealistic but even inapt considering that more than two million children not yet have access even to primary education. Two of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) refer to education and correspond to the EFA goals. Goal 2, achievement of primary education and goal 3, promoting gender equality and empowering women are, as well as the other MDG goals, planned to be achieved in 2020, five years later than what is prescribed for other countries. That children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete primary education and gender disparities will be eliminated at all levels of education are assessed as being “potentially” possible<sup>136</sup>. It is anticipated that “Afghanistan will require extensive, predictable and sustained international aid to meet these targets [and the] Afghan Government has urgently asked donors to provide more aid through government channels... that is, aid in support of the government budget rather than “tied” to the implementation of specific programmes chosen by donors” (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2005, p. xvi -xx). As reported earlier in this chapter, this appeal has not gained sympathy from the donors.

Globalisation has as yet had its most comprehensive effect in Afghanistan by the spread of the world model in education. The suddenly initiated educational expansion from 2002 has affected people all over the country, including many rural, distant villages. In the four years, from 2002 up to and including 2005, the number of enrolled students increased by four million, and the number of teachers employed by the Ministry of Education saw an almost seven fold increase<sup>137</sup> (Ministry of Education, 2006).

In 2006, the Ministry of Education, assisted by the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), elaborated a Five-Year Strategic Plan for Education,

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<sup>136</sup> The assessment scale is: probably – potentially – unlikely – lack of data.

<sup>137</sup> To reach the subgoals of 60 per cent and 75 per cent enrolment rates for girls and boys respectively by 2010, 5,000 new schools are required (Ministry of Education, 2006).

which clearly reflects the current world model in education. The state is not regarded as a central, regulating power directing the course of education but is rather given the role to respond to “the expectations of communities across the country” (ibid. p. 3). Communities are praised for establishing schools on their own without government support, indicating that additional efforts of this kind are welcome. A “quality curriculum” will be developed, “a critical element in building the human capital” (p. 11), [which will assist] to develop economic opportunities within the region and globally” (p. 12). Vocational education “in order to equip [students] with marketable skills ...” (p. 13) will be “focussed on the needs of the private sector and international accreditation” (p. 12). An accelerated learning curriculum will be developed for grades 1 - 6. School Advisory and Supportive Councils as well as Student Councils will be established in each school, the former with the duty to monitor “that teachers and administrators are accountable to local communities and to students” (ibid. p. 70) They should also care for maintenance of schools and manage community contributions/donations. An independent scout authority will be established (ibid.).

The Ministry of Education had at its disposal a total budget of approximately 120 million USD in 2005<sup>138</sup>. An estimate is that the total annual budget of UN organisations, NGOs and private companies active in the education field in Afghanistan budgeted around the same amount<sup>139</sup>. Among UN agencies, UNICEF is the biggest and most important with an education budget of around 15 million USD in 2006 (UNICEF, 2005a). United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is by far the biggest donor in Afghanistan and its allocations for education amounts to some USD 40 million per year. US funds are distributed to American NGOs and more often, to American profit driven companies, who in turn often contract NGOs, of which some are Afghan, for the implementation of education projects (USAID, 2006).

From 2002 and onwards, a great number of NGOs have initiated education projects in Afghanistan, for example International Rescue Committee (IRC), Care International, Save the Children (USA, Japan, Sweden), Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA). However, the Ministry of Education had no compilation or overview of NGOs and other actors in education in 2005. The Five-Year Strategic Plan for Education declares that: “Donor support for the education sector has been quite widespread but uncoordinated, with much of the activity being carried on outside the view of the Ministry of Education in Kabul and based on priorities established by the donors” (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 25).

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<sup>138</sup> The cost per student per year is in Afghanistan 12 USD, to compare with for example, Bangladesh with a student cost of 24 USD and Senegal with 47 USD.

<sup>139</sup> UNICEF had a budget for educational activities of 15 MUSD (UNICEF, 2005a) USAID calculated for 40 MUSD and a great number of NGOs and companies spend 1-10 MUSD annually.

## Quantity

The mass influx of students has forced schools to run in two or even three shifts per day. The same teachers are often teaching in at least two shifts, a condition caused by the difficulty to recruit sufficient numbers of teachers. The shift work, the shortage of teachers and the limited numbers of classrooms have compelled schools to shorten the school days and the school year. So while the pressure to expand access to education has resulted in more boys and girls in schools than ever before, they spend less time in school than pre-war students did. It seems that expansion of students is more important than the number of school hours students are taught.

In 2007, the school year was officially declared to commence at March 21 – two weeks later than school start in pre-war times – but many schools did not begin until the end of March or in the beginning of April for various reasons (unavailability of teachers, no space, lack of transportation, too cold weather, too much snow, or for no special reason at all). The school year is assumed to last nine months, including two weeks vacation, but ends often in late November, after some eight months only. Teachers do not always arrive punctually, they may finish the lesson before closing time or they can be completely absent<sup>140</sup>. These are conditions that also have added to the fact that students now are likely to get less teaching time than in the pre-war schools.

The fact that compulsory education has expanded to nine years may compensate for the loss of time in the primary grades, that is, for those who continue after grade six, but at what must be described as undesirable costs. The education content of grades 7 – 9 has to decrease both quality wise and quantity wise in order to cover up for lost learning in the lower grades. It is expensive to provide in nine years what was previously achieved in six years. Moreover, it is feared that the economic growth is too slow to create job opportunities for all the student cohorts that will graduate in a few years. 660,000 children were estimated to reach the admission age of seven years in 2005, and the number is projected to increase over the next five years. There is an apparent risk that the country will face high youth unemployment rates among the graduated students.

Girls' participation in education continues to attract huge interest. This is reflected in the “national communication strategy” for girls' education (Ministry of Education, 2006 p. 61) to be developed and scholarships will be provided to girls who wish to continue their studies at secondary level (*ibid.*).

## Quality

The global pressure for improved quality in education, for example expressed as those EFA and the MDG goals, which refer to content, methods and assessment, is

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<sup>140</sup> The payroll includes non-working teacher, or “ghost” employees (Ministry of Education, 2006)



obvious also in Afghanistan. The Five-Year Strategy predicts an education system to be developed that will “meet the requirements of effective economic participation in the world”, and which is aimed at fostering “a strong national identity, actively engaged with the rest of the world”. The students are expected to “emerge [as] literate, numerate and technologically proficient as the basis for lifelong learning” (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 3).

A new curriculum was developed in 2003 but already in the beginning of 2002, a revision of the primary school textbooks was initiated. The need for revision was generally acknowledged since different sets of textbooks were used in government and NGO supported schools. In addition, the language in use was often too complicated for children to understand and the content was generally too meagre and not properly sequenced (Ministry of Education, 2003). The donors, who were greatly involved financially as well as with expertise in the revision and printing of the new textbooks, raised an additional reason for the modification: *Jihad* messages and pictures of weapons had to be deleted. The first revised version of the textbooks was printed abroad and paid by USAID. No books on religious subjects were provided, a measure that created animosity and suspicions that the “new rulers” would introduce a completely secular education. Later on, this was corrected when another donor took on the printing and distribution costs for Islamic books.

The curriculum of 2003 outlined the subjects to be taught but somehow additional subjects were later appended and new textbooks subsequently written (or maybe it was vice versa, it is not easy to tell). ‘Life Skills’ (mentioned in the EFA goals) was one of the new subjects implemented for the grades 1 – 3, and which disseminates values understood as clearly Western. Chapter titles such as ‘My Personal Wishes’, ‘My Personal Aims’ and ‘My Personal Rights’ are seen as promoting individualism, which is contrary to Afghan collective values. The subject has no reference to Islam or Islamic values or to Afghan traditions and culture.

As in many other countries, geography and history have been merged into one subject only, called Social Studies (with the result that the history of Afghanistan is paid considerably less attention). The English language is introduced from grade 4, meaning that students start with two new languages in this grade. The revision of textbooks has been a continuous activity and books have been rewritten and reprinted several times since 2002. The books are usually printed on multicolour, glossy high quality paper, which have made them fairly expensive. Donors, who often are interested in quick results, have pushed the Ministry of Education staff to produce new books in a rush. The outcome so far is textbooks with numerous errors, factual faults as well as mistakes due to pure negligence. The employed language is still in many aspects, incomprehensible for children (and often for their teachers too) (Mansory, 2007b).

Teacher education is another area that has attracted much attention from the government and the donors. Learner-centred principles, aimed at responding to every child’s individual needs, discovery-oriented learning, critical thinking and analytical



skills, positive social interaction and so forth are ideas now introduced in Afghan teacher training programmes (Ministry of Education, 2004b). Implementation is, however, challenged by the reality. The large classes, shortage of textbooks and teaching aids, shortage of classrooms, lack of time for lesson preparation and the like are just some examples that will make implementation of these ‘modern’ principles unrealistic. In addition, the individualistic ideas that are advocated do not correspond to the generally accepted norms of a collective responsibility for teaching and learning.

Worldwide, examinations are being abandoned in the lower grades, a phenomenon that lately has been implemented in Afghanistan<sup>141</sup>. However, screening, monitoring and benchmarking is an opposite trend occurring, for example, in Canada, the USA and Great Britain.

Students in grade 1 – 3 pass on to the next grade on the class teacher’s recommendation and not as previously after achieving approval on a final test. According to some teachers, this has resulted in a higher prevalence of repetition for grade four students (see *Chapter 12 Maktab and Madrasa*). This was confirmed in a recent study (Mansory, 2007a).

The high frequency of unqualified teachers<sup>142</sup>, the shortened school time, and the general loose organisation may have less consequence for girls’ education than for boys’ since female teachers (in cities) tend to have higher formal qualifications than male teachers. A man normally chooses the teaching profession as the last option when he cannot find other employment<sup>143</sup> while women with an education find the teaching profession as almost their only alternative<sup>144</sup>. However, while in the urban areas a female teacher has to compete hard for her position, in rural areas, it is common that young female teachers will themselves only have a primary level education, but this deficiency is often compensated by great enthusiasm and commitment (Mansory, 2006).

## Decentralisation and privatisation

The global tendency to reduce the role of the central state and increase the role of lower levels, local communities and private interests is visible also in Afghanistan. A structural reform is being implemented with “a core policy and management oversight capacity in the Central office” of the Ministry of Education [and] “delegation of management decisions and accountability ... to Provincial Education Offices, District

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<sup>141</sup> The situation seems to reverse also in Sweden. Students will get marks two years earlier than before (<http://www.skolverket.se>).

<sup>142</sup> Only 22 per cent of all teachers met the official qualifications of minimum 14 years of education in 2005 (Ministry of Education, 2006).

<sup>143</sup> The Ministry of Education competes on unequal terms with international agencies to retain the better qualified teachers (Ministry of Education, 2006).

<sup>144</sup> 28 per cent of all teachers are women.

level clusters and, through community partnerships, to the individual school level” (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 16, 18). District education supervisors (one for every 90 classrooms) will conduct at least monthly supervision and monitoring. They will “develop and set follow-up goals with teachers and principals, report on monitoring findings, and provide recommendations and feedback to the school management as well as to the Provincial Education Department and the General Education Department” (p. 70). Monitoring will also be done through School Advisory and Supportive Councils. In schools supported by NGOs, Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) have been instigated, at least on paper. Skocpol (1999) labelled PTAs as “associations without members” (cited in Steiner Khamsy, 2002, p. 170), a description that appears to fit also the Afghan PTAs.

At present, several international NGOs and agencies run primary education in so called Community Based Schools (CBSs) without much involvement of the Ministry of Education. UNICEF, Save the Children, SCA and others support 100,000 to 400,000 students (no accurate information exists) in CBSs. The Ministry has, however, recently elaborated Guidelines for CBS and while it seeks cooperation with NGOs also in the future it attempts to limit the NGO involvement to “preschool children and children with disabilities and special needs, including the gifted” (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 60). In the new Strategic Plan, CBSs are not mentioned; instead “outreach classes” closer to children’s homes, are launched. They “may initially be supported by NGOs” (*ibid.*, p. 64).

In-service teacher training programmes are currently also conducted by UNICEF, NGOs and American profit driven companies (on behalf of USAID) outside the control of Ministry of Education. The new Strategy, however, gives no room for others than the Ministry of Education to provide teacher education, but considering the Ministry’s lack of resources, the international organisations will likely play a great role also henceforth.

Private schools have popped up in Kabul, particularly at secondary level and in higher education. An American University was inaugurated in 2004 but students were not admitted until 2007<sup>145</sup>. According to the Strategy, a policy framework for establishing and running of private schools (pre-school, primary and secondary) will be developed and three years later all private schools will be registered. “The government recognizes the vital role that the private sector can play in meeting the current demand for education” (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 62), although the Ministry of Education will define the curriculum framework “private schools will retain some flexibility in order to give students various choices...” (*ibid.*, p. 62).

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<sup>145</sup> The annual fee is 2,500 USD. In 2007, the University provides training only in Business and Administration

## Islam

Several documents issued by the Ministry of Education since 2002 have been labelled 'education policy' and/or 'education strategy', none of which have been acted upon. The 2006 strategy seems to have more possibilities to survive and be used as a plan since it has been endorsed by the Minister and approved by a number of donors. Another positive indicator is that this is the first document of this kind to mention *madrasas* as part of the education system<sup>146</sup>.

As has been described in *Chapter 9 Education in Afghanistan*, a recurrent theme in the history of Afghan education is the struggle of the centre to control Islamic education, which traditionally has been an entirely community affair. Judging from the Five-Year Strategy Plan, a renewal of this struggle might return to the agenda. The Ministry of Education has taken a new initiative to establish state *madrasas*, an initiative, which is said to be justified by the constitution which states: "The state shall devise and implement a unified curriculum based on the provisions of the sacred religion of Islam, national culture,..." (Art. 45), and "The state shall adopt necessary measures for promotion of education in all levels, development of religious education, organizing and improving the conditions of mosques, madrasas and religious centers" (Art 17. Ch 1. Art 17). These statements have been interpreted by the Ministry of Education as the duty to develop "a moderate, modern and tolerant Islamic Education system" (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 94) and as an "[extended] responsibility to the oversight of *madrasas* and the integration of religious and faith based education into the overall system" (ibid. p. 5). A total of 364 secondary *madrasas* (grades 7 – 12), one in each district, will provide Islamic education for an anticipated 90,000 boys and girls by the year 2010. In addition, 68 upper secondary *madrasas* (grades 7 – 14), half of them for girls, in all 34 provinces of the country will be established.<sup>147</sup> The new system for Islamic education will be built on "national consensus" (p. 92) and the curriculum based on "modern principles of inclusion and tolerance" (p. 93). The curriculum will include also "secular" subjects such as mathematics, English and computer skills as well as vocational training. The *madrasa* directors will get management training and the mullah-teachers will learn modern teaching methods with government supervisors monitoring the activities.

In addition, policies for "private and cross-border *madrasas*" (a euphemism for community based and Pakistani *madrasas*, respectively) are being developed. It is hoped that by setting up state *madrasas* there will be no need for Afghans to go to Pakistani *madrasas* and study about Islam (Gran, 2006). Afghans who have participated

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<sup>146</sup> Mosques schools are still considered to be outside the domain of Ministry of Education. They belong to the Ministry of Pilgrimage and Endowments (*Hajj wa Awqaf*).

<sup>147</sup> The Strategy provides statistics on existing *madrasas* in Afghanistan but since the document omits including community based *madrasas* the data are extremely questionable. The provided information is indeed puzzling: In the Southeast region there are 215 female students in *madrasas* but no female teachers while in the Southern region there are no female students at all but one female teacher.

in Islamic education abroad will be “evaluated” at their return (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 98.), using a “databank of questions” that will be developed (ibid.). The registration of community based *madrasas* that has been initiated will be completed by 2009 and all new “private *madrasas* [are] expected to register with the MoE and those who “agree to follow the MoEs curriculum” (ibid., p. 98) will be provided with free educational material.

Thus, primary and secondary education head towards a decentralised system with increased local participation and influence while Islamic education moves in the opposite direction, towards a centralised, state controlled system, contrary not only to current global trends but also to the Afghan tradition.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Globalisation has succeeded modernity and postmodernity as the new paradigm for understanding sociocultural change. However, few nation-states have followed or easily fit into the same developmental sequences from a traditional to a modern and postmodern society (Featherstone & Lash, 1995). Afghanistan will likely be one of these countries that will not fit into such a scheme. Giddens (1991) views globalisation as a consequence of modernity but this is considered by others to be a too simple cause-and-effect reasoning. Robertson (1995) rejects analyses that contradict or oppose present phenomena and sees globalisation as ‘glocalisation’, meaning there is a global creation or institutionalisation of locality going on. The *Loya Jirga* who was summoned in 2002 to elect the new President can be regarded as an example of ‘glocalisation’.

Pieterse (1995) views hybridisation as one aspect or corollary of globalisation<sup>148</sup> and provides examples of hybrid organisations. The newly established public *madrasas*, which will maintain the old curriculum but also add ‘secular’ subjects and which, in particular, will be organised according to ‘modern’ educational structures, is an example of ‘hybridisation’.

Globalisation is not a unidirectional process leading to one global society or one global culture. There are many and different actors in many and different global struggles. Examples of the political globalisation in Afghanistan is the re-emergence of the state, the simultaneous decentralisation of the state power and the creation of civil society organisations. These latter are partially based on existing structures, an example of ‘glocalisation’. Economically, the country is extremely dependent on international aid, and thus vulnerable to economic forces, which the government cannot control. Technologically, the development of telecommunications provides a sharp contrast to the generally low level of development. In the cultural and educational domains, there

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<sup>148</sup> Hybridisation is defined as “the ways in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new practices” (Rowe and Schelling, quoted in Pieterse, 1995, p. 49)

are several processes going on. The Islamic principle of *farz* in education, originally valid only for boys, has come to include also girls – another example of ‘glocalisation’ that has significant consequences.

# Part Four

## The Case Study

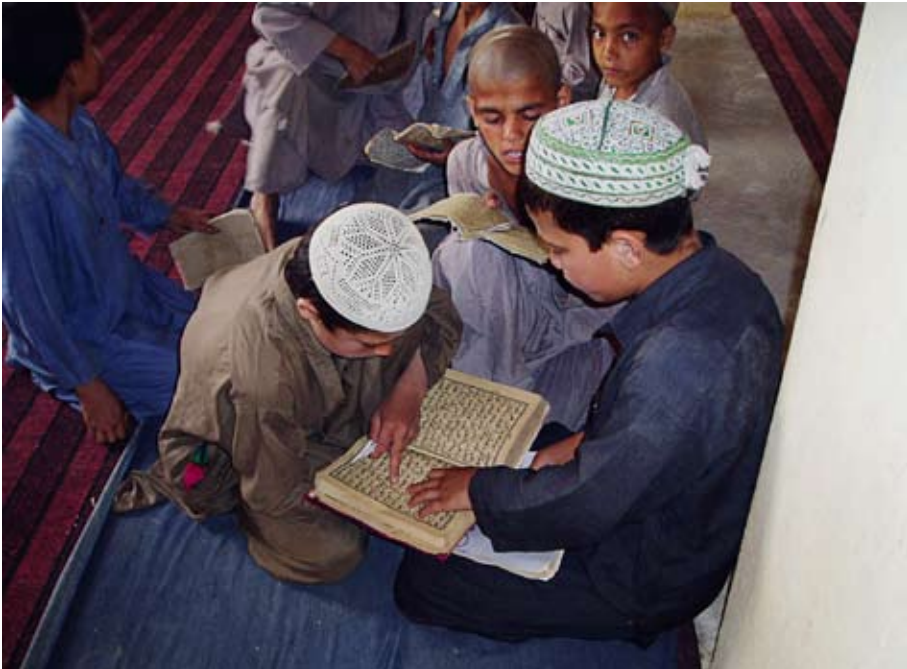


Photo: Pia Karlsson



## Prologue

As previously mentioned, there are many differences between the two villages in this study. They differ with regards to their political situation, their inhabitants and the means by which the people make their living and their experience with education. In particular, the history of girls' education is dissimilar. In spite of all the differences, the views and ideas expressed by the respondents were remarkably similar. A mother in Charbagh who graduated from a secondary school usually shared the same views as her illiterate counterpart in Sujani. A relatively wealthy landowner in Sujani often conveyed the same ideas as those of a landless tenant in Charbagh. Children, regardless of village location, expressed very similar dreams and hopes of future studies and jobs. The commitment to Islam and the concern for Islamic education were strikingly alike. All inhabitants of the two villages had experience of war and refugee life. The craving for peace and development was univocally shared.

The differences, at times disagreements, articulated between thoughts and beliefs can only be related to differences between the villages on the basis of being an exception rather than the norm. The few variations we discovered between the villages were mainly related to girls' participation in education. Socio-economic backgrounds, to the extent they differ between the inhabitants of the two villages, do not account for any particular differences of ideas expressed. Neither do cultural influences differ.

Islam has influenced the cultural patterns of various ethnic groups to such an extent that customs and values are fairly similar all over the country. The prime identity for an Afghan is as a Muslim. It is rare to hear a citizen in Afghanistan characterise her/himself ethnically in the first hand. People regard themselves as Afghans first and foremost. Islam has played a role throughout history in defining the national identity; not least during the turbulence during the last decades. Islam has been a strong factor hindering a fragmentation of the country. Utas (2005) has caught the origin of the Afghan identity:

Traditional Sunni Islam, during most of the history of Afghanistan, has demarcated the country from its neighbours: the Shiite Iran to the west, the *kafirs* of British-ruled India to the east and south, and the Russians, later Soviets, of Central Asia to the north. Afghanistan is like an island, which has kept righteous Islamic authority intact. This Islamic identity has steadily been reinforced by resisting the interference of neighbouring countries ... (p. 234) (*Translation: Pia Karlsson.*)

Given the similarities of the respondents' viewpoints from the two villages, we do not report the findings from them separately but instead deal with the responses as emanating from one case study. The schools are, however, described individually. Whenever the respondent's background (like sex, age, socio-economic background, or occupation) may have significance it is reported. At times, views and statements from our interviews with religious scholars in Kabul are reported as well.





## Chapter Eleven

### Two Afghan villages

In this chapter the two villages are described. First, we tell about the journey and how we were received upon arrival. The description is primarily an account of the population in Sujani and Charbagh. We describe the ethnic groups and the languages they speak, and the educational backgrounds, means of living and main occupations of the people. The chapter includes a short history of the villages, with particular emphasis on recent history and how people experienced the wars and their time as refugees. The types of village institutions and each village's experience with external organisations are described. Finally, the two villages are compared as to location, history, war and refugee experience, the role of Islam and educational institutions.

### Sujani village

#### Arrival

As mentioned in *Chapter 2 Methodology*, after considerable deliberations we finally opted for Sujani village, located in one of the northern provinces, to be the first case study. Amir had made some preparatory visits before Pia arrived in Afghanistan in the beginning of April 2004. In Kabul, we sorted the survey findings into groups as described in *Chapter 2 Methodology* and made a preliminary decision on whom to interview. At last, we were prepared to travel and hired a taxi. The journey followed the road to Pul-e-Khumri through Charikar and Jablul-serij, the latter being a place where the kings of old went hunting in the mountains. After driving some 100 km through passes in the Hindu Kush Mountains we arrived at the famed Salang tunnel at 3,400 meters above sea level. The scenery was marvellous with high snow-capped mountain peaks. After eight hours and some 350 km we arrived at the provincial capital. (The journey back to Kabul lasted more than 12 hours since snowfalls had made the tunnel road extremely icy and slippery).

The next problem to solve was lodging and transport. Ideally, we would have stayed in Sujani for the duration of the study but to find an empty room in any house was impossible. Also the fact that the village had no electricity and poor sanitation facilities made lodging there quite unworkable. Moreover, it is doubtful whether any villager would have been willing to host a foreign woman for such a long period

considering the tense and suspicious environment that was at hand, particularly during the initial days. Thus, lodging had to be found outside the village. We gratefully accepted to stay with the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) who offered us a place at their staff house. Next, we had to solve the transportation issue and we were lucky to find a local taxi driver who brought us to Sujani village daily, a trip that took around 45 minutes one way.

When we arrived the first day we were brought to a guest room<sup>149</sup> that belonged to a health worker in the village. We entered through a gate in a big wall into a small yard with the guesthouse located at the opposite end. There was another gate into the main compound and the other household buildings.

The village *shura* had gathered. Around 25 men were sitting along the walls on the floor on mattresses with cushions behind their backs. The floor was covered with a carpet. Most of them were white-bearded in their 60s and 70s but there were also a few younger men. The “doctor” (one of the younger men) had brought his four-year-old daughter who was sitting next to him. We sat down and introduced ourselves. Amir explained who we were and what we intended to do. The atmosphere was not directly discouraging but we clearly felt that the men had a reluctant, wait-and-see attitude. Quite soon it became evident who was the head of *shura*. He was an old man with a long white beard, called Sufi<sup>150</sup>. Amir said that we planned to write a book about schools and about ordinary people’s views on education. He explained that Pia had been many years in Afghanistan and had worked a lot in education. Judging from the facial expressions they were not impressed but indeed suspicious. Not until Amir showed a letter written by a friend of his who came from a village close to Sujani was the ice broken. The letter was read aloud by one of the younger men. The writer who is a well-known man and respected in wide circles described Amir as a very reliable and trustworthy person. Without that letter we probably would not have been able to implement our study.

Now we were accepted. Sufi and the others welcomed us heartily. From now on, they helped us in all possible ways during our work. Tea was served and the conversation became more and more open and friendly. An initial trust was established and was further developed as our work proceeded during the days and weeks that followed. Sufi himself took the responsibility to be our special caretaker and to safeguard our security.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Practically all houses in Afghanistan have a separate room reserved for receiving male guests. In wealthy families women also have such a separate room.

<sup>150</sup> Sufi is a tender and revered nickname given to males, young or old, who are regarded as particularly pious and who spend much time in the mosque. They are regarded as especially good Muslims. Such a Sufi should not be confused with Sufist, an Islamic mystic.

<sup>151</sup> One afternoon we went with the driver to another area, at a few hours from Sujani to visit an old friend of Amir, who had recently returned from refugee life in Peshawar. We had not informed Sufi in advance. He clearly showed his annoyance when we came back the next day. He wanted to know our whereabouts so he could assist us in case we needed help. The security situation required vigilance.

During our stay we organised our work in three periods: first we visited the schools for classroom observations, next we interviewed parents, and finally, we interviewed teachers and students. In between, we interviewed elders and mullahs. It was nice weather all the time. The fruit trees were blossoming, and the wheat was growing. We strolled between the houses of the core village and wandered to the satellite villages. We walked to the mosques and to the schools. We crossed the water channels along the fields. We met friendly people everywhere.

## **The village and the villagers**

Sufi related that:

Originally we are from the province of Ghor in central Afghanistan. This area was inhabited two to three hundred years ago. It was at first completely covered with thick forests, a forest of high impenetrable bushes. People burnt the trees and bushes and started cultivation with channelled water from the big river. They had a very hard life. They had to protect themselves and their cultivations from many wild animals that lived in the forest. More and more people came and cleared the area. They found the soil very fertile. Around one hundred years ago the government assisted the people here and constructed big canals from the river in various directions. The soil is very good mud and it goes deep down, maybe some 15 meters.

Sujani is located on a plain surrounded by mountains and hills some 30 km southwest of the provincial capital. There is a big river some 20 km away. Around the main or core village, Sujani Ulya, there are twelve small satellite villages.

The road to the core village passed through a tiny bazaar street and ended in the centre of the village. There was an open place with a big mosque that was rehabilitated in the end of the 1990s. Roads or paths connected the one-storey houses, which were constructed by mud and surrounded by walls with entrance gates. There were a handful of two-storey houses. It was not usually necessary to go out through the gate to the road in order to visit a neighbour. There were often, especially if neighbours were relatives, holes or doors in the walls that separated the bordering courtyards. Mostly, each compound had a dug well. The water was usually quite muddy.

Most people lived in extended families. Each nuclear family had access to one to three rooms, depending on the size and wealth of the family. The kitchen area was outside and consisted of an open fire or, in a few cases, of a kerosene flame. Bread was baked in big holes in the ground. The mud floors of the houses were covered by carpets. Along the walls there were mattresses and cushions in bright colours, which were used for sitting in daytime and for sleeping at night. Piled in a corner were bedcovers for night use. One or two wooden cupboards were fixed on the wall and

were used to store household items. The rooms were dark since the windows were small. There were seldom any decorations on the walls but sometimes a poster or a photograph was displayed. Neatly embroidered cloth sometimes covered the cushions. Hens ran around in the compound and often into the rooms as well. A cow might be tied outside together with a goat or two.

There are no official statistics on Sujani inhabitants. According to the initial survey, which collected data from all households, Sujani (the main and the satellite villages) included 282 “nuclear families” with one father as head of the family. Slightly more than 50 per cent of the families, lived in extended families<sup>152</sup>. This is an unusually low figure but can be explained by the fact that many of the families in Sujani had recently immigrated to the village. Others had lived there for only one generation. The nuclear families of the extended family often lived in separate houses but had a shared economy.

The population in Sujani Ulya, the main village, was inhabited by 140 nuclear families. Of these, 130 had children in school age, that is, between seven and 14 years of age. According to information provided by the village *shura*, a majority, around 70 per cent, belonged to a tribe called *Imaq* and were Dari speakers. Of the remaining families, 28 per cent were Pashtuns and two per cent were of Uzbek origin. In the surrounding villages the main population was Pashtun (some 80 per cent) and the others were mainly Tajiks.

**Table 11.1: Children and parents of 130 families in Sujani Ulya<sup>153</sup>**

	Number of individuals			
	Male	Female	Total	Per cent
Children 0 – 6 years	111	107	218	23
Children 7 – 14 years	170	164	334	35
Adult unmarried children (>15y)	61	59	120	13
Total children	342	330	672	71
Parents	130	138	268	29
<b>Total Population</b>	<b>472</b>	<b>468</b>	<b>940</b>	<b>100</b>

The total population of the 130 nuclear families was 940. The school age population amounted to 35 per cent of the population, and to 50 per cent of all children, a number that corresponds to national estimates (Government of Afghanistan, 2005). There were

<sup>152</sup> The concept of extended family is complicated. It may include mother, father, children and the father’s parents. It may include the father’s unmarried brothers and sisters as well as adult married brothers with their wives and children. Less common but still existing are families with men who are married to more than one wife in which case the nuclear family may have several mothers.

<sup>153</sup> The number 138 females as parents implies that there were probably eight families with two wives.

142 families who lived in 12 satellite villages. There the population was around 1,000 people including 350 school age children. Thus, the population size was similar to Sujani Ulya.

It is assumed that the majority of all males in Sujani were illiterate: 67 fathers, 55 per cent, had no formal education. (It should be noted, though, that even without formal education one may be able to read and write). Seven per cent had been students of primary school for at least four years and seven per cent, 9 fathers, had been to secondary school. One fourth had attended one, two or three years of primary school. Only three fathers had participated in Islamic education. This is somewhat astonishing considering the fact that the *madrasa* in Sujani had existed for decades. In addition, many inhabitants had been refugees in Pakistan, where *madrasas* often were the only school available in the refugee camps. No Sujani father had university training.

**Table 11.2: Educational background of Sujani fathers**

Educational level	Primary Gr 1-3	Primary Gr 4-6	Second. Gr 7-12	Higher education	Islamic education	No education	No answer	Total
	31	9	9	0	3	71	7	<b>130</b>
<b>Per cent</b>	24	7	7	0	2	55	5	<b>100</b>

Only six mothers in Sujani had been to school. Two of them had studied for two years, two had spent four years in school, one had completed grade six and one had continued to grade nine. The latter woman was the only female teacher in the school. She was teaching the girls in grade three.

The primary school, with grades one to six<sup>154</sup>, served the main as well as the satellite villages. It was located at the outskirts of Sujani Ulya. There was no secondary school. One big mosque provided Islamic education for children in the mornings and afternoons. In addition, there was an old *madrasa* with boarding facilities. In the main village there were two additional mosques of modest size. Each satellite village had a mosque of its own. Islamic education was provided in all the mosques.

Sujani had no health clinic. The distance to the nearest clinic was ten kilometres. There were no government offices in the village. The bazaar consisted of a few small kiosks and sold commodities like soap, matches, batteries, sweets and soft drinks. A handful of craftsmen such as carpenters and smiths had small workshops. They worked in the open air. Electricity was not available. Only the health worker owned a generator. No telephones<sup>155</sup> and no TV existed but almost everyone had a radio.

Walking was the chief means of transportation within the village and to neighbouring villages. Younger men had bicycles and a few owned motorbikes. Transportation to the provincial capital was available daily via private minibuses

<sup>154</sup> In 2005, the school was “upgraded” to include students up to grade nine.

<sup>155</sup> In spring 2006, the mobile telephones had reached also Sujani.

## Means of living

Around Sujani Ulya the plains are cultivated and irrigated through an intricate system of canals that originates from the big river. The channel has a width of more than two meters when it reaches Sujani. It is like a minor river and distributes the water into major and minor canals and ultimately through narrow ditches to the fields. At each of the joints where the canal splits into two directions there is a *mir-e-aw*, ‘head of water, who organises and supervises the distribution of water. His job is considered very respectable and responsible. The *mir-e-aw* is appointed by the *shura* and the job is often inherited from father to son. All agriculture production in Sujani depends on irrigation. The main crops are wheat, cotton and fruit such as almonds, apricots, apples, pears and melons. Vegetables are also produced for sale in the cities.

For the most part the men work as farmers. At the time of the study some 52 per cent were landowners and worked on their own land while 44 per cent were landless. According to the collected data, around 25 per cent worked as daily workers or tenants. Very few owned large parcels of some 40 *jeribs* (eight hectares). Some others only had a kitchen garden of two *jeribs* (less than half a hectare). The majority of landowners owned around ten *jeribs*. The landless people had usually migrated to Sujani from other areas. One family had come all the way from Kandahar in the south. Many farmers combined their agriculture work with other professions, such as that of being a shopkeeper, driver, carpenter, salesman, teacher, etc. Less than three per cent of the men had a salaried job as the main source of income.

**Table 11.3: Sujani fathers’ main occupations**

	Farmer Own land	Business	Teacher	Imam	Office worker	Skilled labour	Day worker, tenant.	Not known	Total
	68	4	2	2	2	15	32	5	<b>130</b>
<b>Per cent</b>	52	3	1	1	1	12	25	5	<b>100</b>

Poverty in Sujani seemed to be shared relatively equally with a few very extreme exceptions. A few families lived in severe paucity. Table 11.4 shows the economic situation of the surveyed families ranked according to their own perceptions.

**Table 11.4: Sujani families’ economic rankings**

	Poor	Middle	Wealthy	No answer	All
	64	53	5	8	<b>130</b>
<b>Per cent</b>	49	41	4	6	<b>100</b>

## Life during the war period

The province and district in which Sujani is located was extremely affected by the wars. First, during the Soviet occupation, the area was heavily bombarded for several years when the Soviet Union tried to eliminate the *Mujaheddin*. More than half of the population in Sujani left their houses and became refugees. Most people went to Pakistan and Iran but many sought refuge in neighbouring provinces. No “Sujanee” emigrated to the West, and only a few had relatives in Europe or USA.

Those who stayed on described a life of terror. Always in fear of the shelling and bombs they had to seek protection in caves of the surrounding mountains. Under extremely difficult circumstances, the families, including small children and old parents, had to stay in the caves for long periods. Families who went abroad lived in camps around Peshawar and Quetta, and were uncertain what the future would bring. After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 they started to prepare to return. They had, however, to wait for another three years until the marionette regime in Kabul collapsed. In 1992, everyone looked forward to going home again after ten to twelve years of exile. They longed and feared to see what remained of their homes and fields. They returned to start a new life but only to become terribly disappointed as the *Mujaheddin* factions began to fight each other and a new war started. Some families had managed to return to Sujani before the atrocities were in full swing and some travelled the long way back to Pakistan again. This period, 1992 – 1996, was the worst as witnessed by those villagers who stayed on. This is how one mother tells it:

... now we did not know where to go, which mountain caves were safe. One day the forces of Massoud advanced from one side, pushed their enemies in front of them, conquered villages on the way, killed and burned and we had to flee to the other direction, and we ran and ran to the mountains on the other side and hid in the caves. The noise was unbearable. When Massoud and his gang continued westward, chasing the soldiers of one warlord or another and the situation got calmer we moved down to Sujani again. For a period we would have some peace and tried to grow our vegetables and raise our children and then it started again. And now Massoud came back, chased by Dostum forces, and his soldiers from Mazaar-e-Sharif harassed the area. Violence and fires were their normal activities and again we ran, now in the other direction, up to the mountains on the other side and managed to keep ourselves out of sight. It was just horrible and I do not wish this experience on anyone, not even to my worst enemy. But the worst thing was when I was all alone in my house and the children were small, one was only a few weeks old and my husband had had to flee quickly because they were searching the houses to enrol our men by force. I just sat shivering in a corner of the compound with the children around me while they searched the house.



Most of the houses in Sujani were destroyed. The landscape was left with burnt fields and dead animals. The *Taliban* period stopped the lawlessness and order was installed. In Sujani the subsequent human rights abuse, the ban on girls' education, the prohibition for women to work outside home, the obligation for men to have a beard and other violations were not felt that much. However, this calm period was short. The Northern Alliance, the joined forces of Massoud and Dostum, fought back and the *Taliban* lost control. Luckily, the atrocities during this period affected Sujani only to a minor degree. A few families left the village; some never to return.

In April 2004, all these events seemed to be forgotten and buried but maybe just under the surface. Obviously, people had views on those who had left "to live a comfortable life in Pakistan while others had to struggle here". Opinions were aired on those who had remained "and not taken proper care of their children and put all the family's life at stake". More serious were conflicts over land. People on the winning side, the activists or relatives of high-ranking people of the Northern Alliance, had expropriated land that Sujani inhabitants claimed had belonged to them for generations. Due to such conflicts, land areas were unused as no one dared to cultivate them. Everyone praised the current security but the fact that every house had a dog or two on the roof at night indicated that the fear of intruders was still alive. We often recorded expressions of trust and hopefulness but only by the young school children and young fathers and mothers of say, less than thirty years of age. For most people of this age group the last ten years had been relatively peaceful. Many had spent their childhood and adolescence in calm Peshawar. Their minds were not haunted by war memories. They were optimistic and looked forward to the future with hope. Among older people, pessimism was more prominent and feelings of disillusionment were common. They were far from sure that the current situation of peace and reconstruction would prevail.

If we would count the most frequently used word said by Sujani people, 'security' would probably rank as number one. When remembering the past, people said: "there was no security at that time". When they evaluated the past they said: "if only there had been security". When talking about the future they would say: "if security is maintained". Always when they expressed thoughts and hopes for the future, security was brought up as a condition and not always as a certainty: "if security lasts....".

## Village institutions and external organisations

Sujani had, as practically all villages in Afghanistan, a village council, a *shura*. The Sujani *shura* consisted of some 25 members, all male and most of them fairly old. There were, however, some four to five younger men included. Sufi's family consisted

of four brothers<sup>156</sup> and thus the family had significant power and influence<sup>157</sup>. After a number of their sons had grown up the family domination expanded. Other men, particularly those with some educational background as well as the village mullah (a young man, just recently married) also had a certain influence in the *shura*. They met regularly to discuss village affairs and to solve disputes between the villagers. The most common conflicts were related to water distribution and repair of channels. No woman had ever been member of the *shura*.

Contact with government authorities was limited to visits by the provincial school inspectors who, in addition to distributing salaries to the teachers on a quarterly basis, checked the registration and attendance books. A few NGOs had provided some items to the school. The American NGO Mercy Corps had provided window frames (without glass) to the school building and constructed a well and a building with latrines. UNICEF had donated tents for the girl classes as well as school bags and nutrition biscuits to all students of the lower grades. Obviously, hardly anything of all the billions in aid provided to Afghanistan had reached Sujani.

In 2006, the National Solidarity Program (NSP), which aims at addressing the villagers' prioritised needs, had supported rehabilitation of the small bridges crossing the water channels. The roads to the surrounding villages were still in the same bad condition, that is, not passable by car.

## Charbagh village

### The first day in Charbagh

Charbagh is located some 150 km from Kabul. To enter Charbagh was indeed a different experience from Sujani. When we approached the village, we first came to a military post with six to seven soldiers on guard on the left side of the small road. On the opposite side of the road were a small health clinic and a minor power station. The road continued to a bustling bazaar street with plenty of small shops. Meat, shoes, kerosene, fabrics, sugar, flour, notebooks, and many other things were for sale. The bazaar road stretched some 400 meters. On one side, behind the stalls, were walls and houses and on the other side a narrow strip of fields. When we turned right, we saw the school. The road ended and the car had to stop. We walked across a small bridge over a dug canal and after a few hundred meters we entered through a gate in a wall into the compound of the girl school. We met the male headmaster in the big combined headmaster office and teachers' room. Pia was introduced and welcomed. It was not

<sup>156</sup> One brother had disappeared, probably killed or jailed.

<sup>157</sup> More sons in a family does not only secure the parents' old age but also gives more power and influence in village affairs, particularly if combined with above the average wealth.

the first time he had met a Swedish woman, it had happened twice before<sup>158</sup>.

As in Sujani, people here looked curiously at us. Our arrivals and departures caused a great deal of attention. There were always plenty of people around, the bazaar was crowded, and many cars passed through every day. In general, people were as friendly as in Sujani but no doubt, there was a predominantly tense and apprehensive atmosphere. Some sign gave us hints to be cautious and thus we decided to expose ourselves as little as possible<sup>159</sup>. Thus most of the interviews took place inside the schools, not only with teachers and students but also with other respondents.

### The village and the villagers<sup>160</sup>

A clear majority of the Charbagh population were Pashtuns. For centuries a semi-nomadic minority, the Kohistanis, a sub-tribe to Nuristanis, inhabited some of the nearby mountain villages. Kohistanis have a language of their own but are mostly bilingual since they usually, also speak Pashto fluently.

A myriad of houses are clustered on one side of the road and along the hillsides. It looks almost like a town. A few large buildings were under construction; built with brick rather than mud as houses elsewhere in the village. The main village was very densely populated. In some cases, several families lived together in compounds while newcomers to the area, as for example recently settled large, lived squeezed together in one or two small rooms. Judging from the homes we visited, there was a much bigger difference in living standards between the families of Charbagh than in Sujani. While some lived in extremely poor conditions others were quite well off. Some families had relatives abroad who regularly sent remittances to family members and/or for investments in house construction. A brand new mosque in bright colours was another sign of emigrant financing.

As in Sujani, it was not possible to find any official data on the population in Charbagh. The initial survey covered 386 households in the main village and 74 families in new settlements outside the village. In total 460 families were surveyed. Of these 344 families had children aged 7 - 14 years. The school age children constituted 41 per cent of the population and 69 per cent of all children.

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<sup>158</sup> Pia had visited the school in 1997, but did not meet the headmaster. The school was closed by the *Taliban* and teaching took place in the homes of the female teachers.

<sup>159</sup> In 2006, the security situation had worsened. Four schools in the province, of which two were in the neighbourhood of Charbagh had been put on fire, and partially burnt down. In Charbagh, the *shura* had decided to contract night guards for each school; each student contributed to their salaries by 10 Afs (0.2 USD) per month.

<sup>160</sup> This section is mainly based on information from the village *shura*.

**Table 11.5: Age composition of 344 families in Charbagh Village  
(including two satellite villages)**

	Number of individuals			
	Male	Female	Total	Per cent
<b>Children 0 – 6 years</b>	176	170	346	15
<b>Children 7 – 14 years</b>	475	456	931	41
<b>Adult unmarried children (&gt;15y)</b>	142	136	278	12
<b>Total children</b>	793	762	1555	69
<b>Parents</b>	344	351	695	31
<b>Total population</b>	<b>1, 137</b>	<b>1, 113</b>	<b>2,250</b>	<b>100</b>

The educational level among the parents was generally higher in Charbagh than in Sujani as seen in tables 11.6 and 11.7:

**Table 11.6: Educational background of Charbagh fathers**

Level	Primary Gr 1-3	Primary Gr 4-6	Second. Gr 7-12	Higher Education	Islamic education	No educa- tion	No answer	Total
	42	20	71	1	5	196	9	<b>344</b>
<b>%</b>	23	6	21	0	1	57	3	<b>100</b>

**Table 11.7: Charbagh mothers' educational background**

Level	Primary Gr 1-3	Primary Gr 4-6	Second. Gr 7-12	Higher Education	Islamic education	No form education	No answer	Total
	43	29	20	1	1	237	20	<b>351</b>
<b>Per cent</b>	12	8	6	0	0	69	5	<b>100</b>

Twenty-one per cent of the fathers had completed or had some years of secondary education. Among the mothers, corresponding figure was six per cent. A total of 57 per cent of the fathers and 69 per cent of the mothers had no formal schooling at all. All the teachers in the girl school were female and all had studied in secondary schools. All except one had completed grade twelve. Two had also studied at teacher training college. Usually, the women had studied when they lived in refugee camps in Pakistan during the 1990s. The Charbagh women clearly exceed the national average with regards to female literacy.

There were two big schools in Charbagh, one for girls and one for boys. Both included secondary grades (for girls so far only up to grade nine). There were two big mosques, both recently constructed, and a few smaller more traditional one in the neighbourhood. There was a functioning health clinic supported by a foreign NGO. There was no electricity. The small power station was privately owned and for private use only. Quite many families had a generator of their own. Mobile telephones were also fairly common as well as radios but television sets were scarce.

### Means of living

Charbagh has a long tradition of education. “Charbaghees” have held many government positions in the district and provincial capitals as well as in Jalalabad and Kabul for many decades. They often settled in these cities but kept land in Charbagh. This land is now cultivated by tenants. In Charbagh, the majority of families get their means of living from agriculture. Only 23 per cent were landowners while 54 per cent worked on others’ properties as day workers.

**Table 11.8: Charbagh fathers’ main occupations**

	Farmer Own land	Business	Teacher	Imam	Office worker	Skilled labour	Daily worker, tenant	Not known	Total
	79	7	10	9	10	34	185	10	<b>344</b>
<b>Per cent</b>	23	2	3	2	3	10	54	3	<b>100</b>

A majority of the people in Charbagh had earnings from side jobs. They were craftsmen, shopkeepers, and had salaried positions often as government employees. For eight per cent of the fathers, a salaried job was the main income source.

Craftsmanship has a long tradition in Charbagh. In the early 1970s, it was estimated that at least ten per cent of the population had other means of living than agriculture. These families had often originated from other areas and were, for instance, bakers, tinsmiths, jewellers, potters, and the like. Roads were named after them, and still one alley was called ‘Baker’s road’. Another alley was named after a group of families who extracted oil from plants. In Charbagh there was a minority of Hindus who had lived there for a long time and had a place of worship there until the mid 1980s. One road was called the ‘Hindu road’. The Hindu families had left but many families with a long tradition of skilled craftsmen still inhabited the area, serving not only Charbagh but the whole district and beyond.

The cultivable land is relatively scarce in and around Charbagh. The land is not very fertile, which might be one reason why inhabitants seek other sources of income. Another reason might be that the inherited fields become smaller with every generation and eventually the plots of land are insufficient to support a family. The predominance of small landholdings coupled with Islamic inheritance laws, which stipulate that property is equally shared among brothers, has resulted in increasing land fragmentation. Many sold their land when their plots became too tiny. In 2004, three to four per cent of the population were owners of most of the cultivable land in Charbagh. One family had as much as 60 *jeribs* (15 hectares), while more than 40 families had ten to twelve *jeribs* (3 hectares). The great majority were landless or had only a small plot for kitchen gardening.

The soil is sandy but the climate is favourable: the winters are mild and summers are warm. Two and even three harvests per year are common. A nearby river provides water to irrigation channels. Mostly, the irrigated fields in Charbagh are just small strips of fields. The main crops are vegetables and rice. Charbagh is located close to the road to Kabul and a common activity is to grow cucumber, cauliflower, onion, and other vegetables for sale to the city population. Even very small landowners are engaged in growing and selling vegetables. The availability of water allows for rice cultivation: however this crop requires sizeable plots. During harvest periods almost all family members are needed for work.

When asked about their economic status 50 per cent considered themselves as belonging to the medium strata. In Sujani, 47 per cent identified themselves as ‘middle’ but to the visitor’s naked eye the ‘middle’ in Charbagh corresponded more to what was considered ‘wealthy’ in Sujani.

**Table 11.9: Charbagh families’ economic rankings**

Ranking	Poor	Middle	Wealthy	No answer	All
	142	173	8	21	344
Per cent	43	50	2	5	100

## Life during the war period

According to members of the village *shura*, the Communist take over in 1978 resulted in strong resistance in Charbagh and many participated in the fighting against the government. Some 15 men from Charbagh were killed and many were jailed.

The location close to a road between two big cities made the area a special target for both Soviet and *Mujaheddin* war activities. Houses, fields, animals were bombarded and burned. In total, 1,000 to 1,200 people were killed in the district during the 1980s, mainly by Soviet shelling. On one occasion in 1983, the government army massacred several hundred people. All the families except one, whose house was the headquarter for the local *Mujaheddin*, had left the area in 1983. Charbagh village was completely deserted. The villagers went to refugee camps in Peshawar or to Kabul. Quite a few emigrated abroad, in particular people with higher education, which contributed to the severe brain drain that Afghanistan has suffered. In 1986 - 1987 *Mujaheddin* gained better control of the area and although the situation was still unstable many families, or some family members, returned. In 1992, there was a new wave of returning families who started to reconstruct their houses. Others returned in 2002 or later. Now, the village seemed very crowded but according to the village *shura*, some 60 per cent of the population have still not returned. Some families have been abroad for more than 20 years. All their children have grown up and been to school in Pakistan, and some even got married and had children before they returned to their (parents') home village. During their absence, people from other areas moved in, nomads settled, and government land was occupied. All these situations created conflicts some of which are still far from being resolved. Politically, inhabitants had been on different sides: some people had been affiliated with the Communist parties while others supported or struggled with the *Mujaheddin*. When the *Taliban* arrived in summer 1996 communists as well as *Mujaheddin* ducked.

The strained situation we so clearly sensed might be the result of the recent history, as indicated above, but may also have been due to the ongoing situation. American bombers had attacked near-by villages and allies to the American (old warlords) roamed the mountains. That we were regarded suspiciously was not strange. To trust a Western woman might be unwise. Even to rely on an Afghan man originating from another province may not be advisable.

## Village institutions

The village *shura* in Charbagh included the school headmasters and other men with some education in the village. They met regularly in order to solve disputes and mediate between conflicting fractions or to plan for various activities of common interest in the village.

Several international and national NGOs were active in the area and provided

support for education. SCA had been supporting the schools in Charbagh since 1992. A Danish NGO had constructed the school buildings. Several American NGOs and companies ran literacy courses, health information activities and so called ‘accelerated learning classes’ for out of school children. In these classes a majority of children, particularly the boys, were also enrolled as students in the primary school. The same teachers were working in both types of schools. Students in these classes received cooking oil and flour as incentives for participation while the teachers were paid in cash. As reported in the next chapter, these additional educational activities had the unfortunate, but probably unintentional, effect of hampering girls’ retention in primary education.

## The villages compared

In table 11.10 a comparison of the two villages is provided. The size and type of village, its location with regards to proximity to roads and cities, and its ethnic composition are compared. Educational experience, relation to Islam, and life during the war periods are compared as well as the general atmosphere as we felt it.

**Table 11.10: Sujani and Charbagh compared**

	<b>SUJANI April 2004</b>	<b>CHARBAGH December 2004</b>
Location and history	<p>Typical small rural village located quite close to the provincial capital</p> <p>Poor roads.</p> <p>Tiny bazaar with few items.</p> <p>Inhabited for 2 to 3 hundred years.</p> <p>Many new settlers from other provinces.</p>	<p>Semi-rural, big village close to main road leading to Kabul.</p> <p>Bustling bazaar with plenty of goods.</p> <p>Inhabited for more than 1000 years.</p> <p>Few new settlers from other areas.</p>
Atmosphere	<p>We left the car and walked around in the core village and on the paths to the satellite villages. All homes easily accessible for interviews.</p> <p>Welcoming, positive atmosphere.</p> <p>No experience of visiting foreigners.</p>	<p>We went by car from door to door. Only rarely walked to visits/interviews. Strongly advised to stay inside the schools for interviewing.</p> <p>Suspicious, reluctant atmosphere.</p> <p>Some male and female foreigners (Swedish) had visited the schools before.</p>



	SUJANI April 2004	CHARBAGH December 2004
Population	Core village and each satellite village have well defined borders. Inhabitants are often relatives, although sometimes distant. Harmony seems to dominate.	Big expansion recently; village border erased. Many people are strangers to each other. Disharmony seems prevalent.
	70 % Tajiks, 28 % Pashtuns, 2 % Uzbeks in the core village;	Large majority are Pashtuns. Few minority groups (e.g. Kohistani).
	Language according to ethnicity	Pashto language dominates but Dari is commonly spoken too.
	55 % of fathers, 96 % of mothers have no education. 1 female teacher is employed.	57 % of fathers, 69 % of mothers have no education. 22 female teachers employed (16 in primary school).
	52 % are farmers on own land, on average of 10 jeribs (2 hectares). 25 % are daily workers or tenants. A few work as craftsmen.	23 % are farming own land; land size varies a great deal. 54 % are daily workers or tenants. Many receive remittances from relatives abroad.
	Only teachers have government jobs.	Many types of craftsmen. Many teachers and some other government employees. Several "Charbaghees" are government staff in Kabul.
	3 % have a salary as main source of income. 58 % are children under 15 years. Very small class gaps. Few, if any regarded as middle class.	8 % have a salaried job as main source of income. 57 % are children under 15 years. Visible class differences, extreme poverty as well as considerable wealth.
Schools	Primary school since 2002 (1977) Girl school since 2002 grades 1–3 No secondary school	Primary school since the 1930s. Girl school since 1957. Secondary school for boys up to grade 12, for girls up to grade 9.
	One old <i>madrassa</i> , boarding school with 8 <i>taliban</i> . No <i>Dar-ul-hefaz</i> .	Recently reopened <i>madrassa</i> . Several <i>Dar-ul-hefaz</i> .

	SUJANI April 2004	CHARBAGH December 2004
Signs of modernisation	<p>No electricity. One private generator</p> <p>Dug wells with muddy water. 10 km to nearest health clinic.</p> <p>Most households with radio, no one with TV. No telephones.</p> <p>No car in the village. A few motor bikes, quite a number of bicycles owned by young boys/men.</p> <p>Very limited experience of NGOs.</p> <p>Boy students and male teachers in Western clothes. Girl students and female teacher in traditional dresses.</p> <p>Most men wear turbans</p>	<p>No electricity. Many private generators and one private power station.</p> <p>Many drilled wells with clean water.</p> <p>Health clinic in the village.</p> <p>Most households with radio. A few TV sets. Some with mobile telephones.</p> <p>Several car owners. Many motor-bikes and numerous bicycles (for boys and men).</p> <p>Decades of experience of SCA. Many ongoing NGO activities.</p> <p>Boys and male teachers dressed in <i>shalwar kameez</i> (Traditional dress for males). Girls in uniform, female teachers in modernised traditional dresses.</p> <p>Few men with turbans.</p>
War and refugee experience	<p>Some joined <i>Mujaheddin</i> groups of the district/province.</p> <p>Half the population left in the early 80s; a majority returned in 1992 but fled again.</p> <p>No emigrants to the West.</p> <p>No war atrocities ongoing.</p> <p>Land ownership conflicts</p>	<p>Stronghold for <i>Mujaheddin</i> resistance. Many men participated</p> <p>Charbagh was deserted in the 1980s. Some returned in the 1990s. Majority only in 2002.</p> <p>Many emigrated to the West.</p> <p>Still unstable situation.</p> <p>Political tensions noticeable.</p>
Islam	<p>Strong position of Islam.</p> <p>One big central mosque, renovated 1999 by <i>Taliban</i> government.</p> <p>Many small simple mosques.</p> <p>Only mosque education for girls.</p> <p><i>Madrasa</i> on the decline.</p> <p>Traditional Muslims.</p>	<p>Strong position of Islam.</p> <p>Several new big mosques constructed, financed by emigrants and Arab organisations. Many small mosques.</p> <p>Mosque school and <i>madrasa</i> for girls.</p> <p><i>Madrasas</i> being revived</p> <p>Traditional Muslims and Islamists.</p>

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

As described in this chapter, the villages of Sujani and Charbagh are different in many aspects. Sujani represents a traditional rural village with few contacts with outside realities while Charbagh is in a semi-rural setting located close to the main road and not far from big cities. Charbagh's location and its longer experience with education are probably the main reasons for the differences between the two villages. However as we shall see later, these differences did not result in different views on the matters related to this study.

## Chapter twelve

### *Maktab and Madrasa*

This chapter starts with a description of Islamic education, first as observed in Sujani and then in Charbagh. Characteristic features of the teaching and the way students were learning in the Islamic schools are described and discussed. Then, the boy and girl classes of the primary school in Sujani are presented followed by a similar account of the two primary schools in Charbagh. Thereafter follows an account of teaching in the schools, a report that covers all the observed primary schools in both villages. To describe the teaching in each separate school was not found to be meaningful since there are more similarities than differences. A discussion of students' absenteeism, drop out and repetition rates is then provided. In the last section there is a comparison of the teaching and learning in *maktab* and *madrasa*, respectively. The chapter is based mainly on observations and to some extent on interviews with the villagers. In some cases, information obtained in the spring of 2006 is added.

## Islamic education in Sujani and Charbagh

### The Mosque School in Sujani

In the centre of Sujani village is a big, recently constructed mosque. The main mosque school is located inside the mosque. In the mosques located on the outskirts of the village and in the satellite villages, there are additional mosque schools. The central mosque has only one big room, a space of around 150 m<sup>2</sup>. One enters through a huge wooden door situated in the middle of the long side of the wall and inside, opposite the entrance, is a large niche or alcove. That is the *mehrab*, the place from where the imam leads the prayers. The alcove is decorated with beautiful calligraphy: verses of the Quran. The other walls are painted in light yellow. There are several carpets on the floor. The ceiling is supported with a row of pillars that divide the room into two sections. Daylight floods through several big windows. Outside the mosque there is an empty square, surrounded by some large trees and small vegetable fields. Adjacent is another building, an old house in obvious need of repair. This is the (in the past) renowned Sujani *madrasa*.

The Ministry of Education is not responsible for education in mosque schools. Mosques, including mosque schools belong under the Ministry of Pilgrimage and Endowments. The mosque school in Sujani, similar to mosque schools in other

places in Afghanistan, is run by the community. Usually, the imam of the mosque is responsible for teaching the children but in Sujani the imam was head of the *madrassa* and was teaching the *taliban*. The village *shura* and the imam had agreed to appoint the oldest *talib*, who was 16 years old, to be the teacher. He had previously studied a few years in a primary school (in his home village some 50 km from Sujani) in addition to many years of studies in the *madrassa*. He had not attended any teacher training course. In fact, there are, as yet, no such courses available for mosque school teachers. All mosque schools use the same textbooks. Parents have to purchase books and stationary for the children. Commonly, children inherited their books from older siblings. Indeed many books appeared quite worn and had dog-eared pages.

The children came early in the morning, from 5.00 to 6.30, through the open door one by one, leaving their shoes outside on the staircase<sup>161</sup>. Depending on arrival time, some children spent an hour or more in the mosque while others were there only for some ten minutes. They sat down, crossed legged, on the floor in two long rows. The girls were sitting along the wall and opposite them, the boys sat along the row of pillars. Some adults, young and old men, were sitting in other places in the mosque room. They were reading the Quran, praying or meditating. Most of the children had brought their books and started to read, individually or together with an older student. They took the initiative themselves to make groups and read the Quran together. Some children read in one of the preparatory books while others were writing letters in a notebook. A few children wrote on a slate.

The teacher was also sitting on the floor at the end of the two rows. He had a small, low table in front of him. There was no blackboard. Occasionally, a boy or a girl went up to the teacher to report what had been learned. The teacher corrected the pronunciation and gave instructions as what to read next. Homework was not distributed. Sometimes the teacher walked around to supervise the students. He was harsh to the children and swung his long tree twig in the air to scare them into order. Quite often he used it to hit the children's backs. The students were at times quite unruly. They were noisy and chatted, tittered and laughed aloud. They tickled, pinched and pushed each other.

Virtually all children between five, six years up to eleven, twelve went to the mosque school although far from all went every day. On average, around 50 girls and some 100 boys were present, which corresponds to about 30 per cent of all children in the 'catchment area'. Children as well as the teacher were dressed in traditional clothes. Some children also visited the mosque school in the afternoons, after primary school. In spite of the unkind teacher the children did not seem to be afraid of him; maybe because he was so young. Both girls and boys laughed and smiled and seemed to enjoy the school. According to the teacher, there were more children in wintertime than in summer. Particularly during harvest time the attendance rate was quite low. Around seven o'clock the studies were over and the children went home for breakfast. They then had a glass of milk or a cup of tea and a piece of bread before they went to

<sup>161</sup> Pia, although *kafir* (not Muslim), was allowed to enter the mosque.

*maktab*. For the boys, going to the *maktab* required a change of clothes.

## The *Madrasa* in Sujani

The Sujani *madrasa* is a boarding school. In the spring of 2004 only eight boy students in their late teens were *taliban*<sup>162</sup>. They studied individually under guidance of the imam. He stayed with the students half the week and then went home to his family who lived in another district. The *taliban* lived in some small rooms in a simple barracks close to the big mosque. All of them came from other villages; two from far way provinces. They studied on their own according to the curriculum of *madrasa* studies as described in *Chapter 9 Education in Afghanistan*. All students except one had studied for more than six years. During the summer they usually went home to their families to help with the harvest. The imam and the students cultivated their own vegetables but the main meals were provided by the villagers who took turns delivering them dinner.

## The Mosque School in Charbagh

In Charbagh there are five to six mosques of various sizes. The mosque school we observed is located in a mosque in one of the satellite villages<sup>163</sup>. It is a modest building, constructed by mud with no decorations and no minaret. Inside is one big room where only a little daylight filters in through the small windows. The mud floor is uncovered. At the time of the study the village imam was the teacher. He was a serious man with both primary and *madrasa* education. He had been a primary school student in the 1970s and after finishing grade six he had continued in the famous *madrasa* of Jalalabad and later completed his studies in a Pakistani *madrasa*. He was a married man with a big family. His main occupation was farming and he grew wheat and vegetables on a small piece of land outside the mosque. The work as imam provided a little extra income.

In the early mornings approximately one hundred children attended the mosque school. Given the small size of the village, this more or less corresponded to at least 50 per cent of the total number of village children. In the mornings 75 per cent of the students were boys while in the afternoons, there were an equal number of boys and girls but the total number of students was less than 70. The girls were sitting in a corner, reading quietly on their own. The boys sat in three long rows. The girls crouched down seemingly in order not to draw attention to themselves. The students

<sup>162</sup> In spring of 2006 the number of *taliban* had increased to ten.

<sup>163</sup> Pia's presence was accepted also in Charbagh mosque but not as welcoming as in Sujani.

were more disciplined than the children in Sujani. They arrived almost simultaneously and the lesson ended at the same time for all of them. The teaching was, compared to Sujani, more ordered and less individualised. The teacher had a certain degree of authority and the students were more obedient. We did not see any twig or stick in use. Now and then the teacher called the students to come up to his place and they read out loud for him. The imam paid more attention to the boys. He would stand in front of them, reciting the Quran and the boys repeated in chorus. The girls were left alone.

### The *Madrasa* in Charbagh

The *madrasa* in Charbagh had, as mentioned, closed down in early 2002, shortly after the fall of the *Taliban*. Recently, however, a refugee returnee had taken the initiative to revitalise the *madrasa* in one of the new mosques. He was a young man who had graduated from secondary school and, in addition, had studied many years in a Pakistani *madrasa*. There were some ten students who attended the new *madrasa* on a regular basis. Most of them were boarding students and lived in a separate big room of the mosque.

There was also a *madrasa* for girls in Charbagh. It represents one of the very few Islamic schools for girls in Afghanistan<sup>164</sup>. The students were teenage girls and most of them had never been to a primary school. They received a sack of sugar, a *patou* (a large shawl or blanket) and 100 Afghanis (2 USD) per month as incentive for participating in the course. Some 20 girls attended regularly. A few had previously been students in the girl school and knew how to read but said they wanted to learn more about Islam. (The incentive items might have been another reason). The school was supported by an Afghan NGO with US financing. It was initially launched (and reported on) in two different ways: to the donors as a literacy course, which included reading, writing, counting, and some Quran reading and to the parents as an Islamic school with Quran memorisation and recitation as its main content. In reality it was a combination: a literacy course including elementary knowledge about Islam and memorisation of some Quran verses. The female teacher had received her Islamic education from Pakistan and in addition had eight years of Western type of education. She was also teaching in the primary girl school. The course was scheduled to run for six months, from eight to eleven every day except Fridays.

### The Quran school in Charbagh

Charbagh also had a Quran school, *Dar-ul-hefaz*, where boy students learned to

<sup>164</sup> In Pakistan almost one third of all *madrasa* students enrolled in 1998 were girls (Andrabi et al., 2006).

memorise the Quran. The teacher was a *Qari* and he taught three groups with a total of around 75 boys every day for an hour and a half. Teaching took place in the compound of one of the minor mosques outside the core village. A majority of the boys also attended the primary or secondary school, which the teacher encouraged them to do. He himself had studied up to grade seven in *maktab*. He estimated that two to five years are required for a student to learn the entire text of the Quran. Learning the Quran includes not only memorisation, or learning by heart but also recitation. The recitation should sound melodious and the Arabic words must be pronounced accurately and clearly. The teacher taught the boys one by one how to pronounce correctly and recite beautifully before they practised on their own. Every boy sat cross-legged in front of a small Quran stand and practised the verses. After a while they tested each other on what they had learned by heart. The *Qari* explained that memorising the Quran is a way to please Allah but it is not considered compulsory for every Muslim.

## Teaching in the Mosque Schools

The teaching and learning we observed in the mosque schools share many traits of teaching and learning in primary schools (which will be described later) but there are also some particular differences. For example, that children tend to attend on an irregular basis, common in both educational settings, was more conspicuous in the mosque schools. This is a problem in the primary schools since students are expected to follow the same curriculum and proceed at the same pace. In the mosque schools, the teacher did not differentiate between the students. They were not divided into classes or sections according to age, learning capacity or accomplished stage of studies. They were allowed to learn at their own pace but were expected to learn the same contents and in the same order.

The mosque schools in Sujani and Charbagh demonstrated some of the methods that the teachers in primary schools go to courses and in-service teacher training programmes to learn. For instance, students were engaged in a kind of “group work”: they sat in circles and read one at a time for each other. Such arrangements often took place on the students’ own initiative without the teacher’s interference (or notice). On their own initiative too, older girls or boys gathered some of the younger pupils and helped them to learn some verses of the Quran.

The mosque school teacher was expected to have the skills required for phrasing and pronouncing the Quran as convention prescribes. He was to act as a model for children. Children must learn by heart some *suras* of the Quran and recite them harmoniously. The children read aloud, over and over again, rocking to and fro to keep the rhythm and pace. Unless children memorise these *suras* they would not be able to perform the daily prayers. The adult respondents in the villages told us that they knew



between two and 50 *suras* by heart. Most people, men as well as women, knew some 10 - 15 *suras*. (Two mothers said, however, that they did not know any but still prayed every day). Children were also taught the body movements involved in praying by imitating the teacher and simultaneously saying the prayers.

We never heard a teacher who tried to explain the Arabic text of the Quran. Memorising was the principal learning method. The teachers did not have any “aids”, not even a blackboard at their disposal.

In addition to memorisation of the Quran and learning how to pray, children studied their first textbook. Paradoxically, one must be a pretty experienced reader to be able to read in Pashto or Dari. Without being familiar with the context and without possessing a certain vocabulary it is difficult to interpret the letters and arrange them to words. In the “ABC-book” that is used in mosque schools the short vowels are denoted by special signs, similar to those used in Arabic, in order to guide pronunciation. Special marks below or above consonants and long vowels help children learn how to pronounce and read the words. These “diacritical signs” (Wagner, 1993) support and facilitate children’s initial reading. These signs are not used in the textbooks in school or in Dari or Pashto books in general. Thus, attending the mosque school prepares children for reading in primary school. One of the interviewed teachers believed that:

things children learn in the *madrasa* [here: mosque school, our remark] are very helpful in the *maktab* too. Our languages have many words from Arabic, so if a child learns some reading in the *madrasa* he can learn the language very easily in *maktab*. The same goes for grammar. If a student learns in the *madrasa* and then in *maktab*, she or he will be number one in class, I am sure, I believe so. Additionally, we have the same subjects in school, we learn Islamic issues also in school, so it helps a lot to go to *madrasa* first.

A student who attends the mosque school before primary school has an advantage not only in the sense that s/he has become familiar with letters and numbers and maybe learned to read but also because s/he has been socialised into the school culture. The child has learned to better control his/her impulses, to sit calmly (although sitting on a chair may be a new experience), wait for his/her turn, not to speak out at will, to raise hand and many other things expected from a student. Teachers commonly believed that *madrasa* prepares children for *maktab*, or as one teacher put it: “if children go to *madrasa* they will be cleverer in *maktab*”.

To learn Islamic ethics is one of the goals of mosque education. The books with moral poems and stories the children in Sujani and Charbagh studied are used in all mosque schools in Afghanistan. They are centuries old, and the ancient language is sometimes difficult to understand. Usually, the teacher explained unfamiliar words to the children, and by providing examples from the children’s everyday life the meaning of the stories was made comprehensible.

Parents strongly believed in the power of the books to instil good morals and good

manners in their children. In rural Afghanistan, illiterate parents or parents with poor reading ability often have a degree of overconfidence in the written word, particularly printed text. Being able to read and write represents a force they are excluded from. In Sujani and Charbagh, the parents and other respondents without literacy abilities knew of one book only, the book that existed in each and every house: The Quran. The respect and the value attached to the Quran spills over to other books as well.

In general, people have high esteem for virtues such as discipline, indulgence and hard work. To make efforts, to be energetic and industrious are necessary abilities for memorising the Quran. Most people shared the idea that memorising the Quran strengthens memory and concentration. These capacities together with personal discipline were considered as being the most important for success in school. As has been elaborated upon in *Chapter 3 Education and Knowledge in Islam*, learning, according to Islam, does not only involve the mind. Learning is the actualisation of the whole person, involving the body, the mind and the spirit, or, in other words, it is a physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual process. To memorise the Quran was considered an act that includes the development of all these aspects.

Boyle (2004) reports how parents in Morocco used the terms “learning” and “memorisation” synonymously when they talked about their children’s studies. Parents believed in the necessity of memorising some verses of the Quran even if the children did not “perceive things as such” but “they should learn ...so as to adapt themselves to it. If they learn the Quran at an early age, they will always yearn for it when they become old” one of the interviewed mothers said (p. 90).

What did the students and teachers in Sujani and Charbagh think about memorisation as a learning technique? Many regarded learning as being identical to memorisation (and to the ability to respond to the teacher’s questions). Khan, aged 14 explained: “When the teacher asks us to learn something by the next day I have to memorise, otherwise I cannot answer”. Particularly the boys in Sujani favoured memorisation as a learning technique. They had spent several years in the *madrasa* when the *maktab* was closed during the wars and the *Taliban* period. They had progressed beyond the basics of Islamic education and through diligent memorisation sharpened their memory skills. Many boys clearly stated without hesitating: “We learn better when we memorise”.

The boys in Charbagh who did not share the same experience of *madrasa* had dumped the traditional technique. They favoured understanding the “modern” and therefore best technique for learning. Momen, a 13 year old boy said: “We cannot memorise everything. One must think and understand too. If you look at something outdoors, for example, it cannot be memorised, one has to understand it”.

All girls without exception preferred comprehension to memorisation. Maybe the reason was that they had very little experience with memorising the Quran. Their female teachers had limited experience with Islamic education but had spent many years in Western type of schools. Some of them had also graduated from teacher

training colleges. At these institutions, memorisation is considered an outdated and old-fashioned learning technique.

The Islamic teachers preferred memorisation but stressed the importance of understanding too. Memorisation has the advantage of “training the mind”, a mullah in Sujani explained, because children have to concentrate and pay close attention to what they read. “Some suras of the Holy Quran must be memorised also by small children even if they don’t understand it. Understanding will come later”, he argued. The Islamic teachers also brought up imitation as a valuable technique for learning. “Imitation, *taqlid*, is very important in Islamic learning. Imitation makes it easier for children to learn, for example, about ablution and praying” the imam in Sujani declared.

Kashraf, a judge of the Supreme Court in Kabul, emphasised the obligation of every human being to use the mind. He stated that the capacity to think and reason, “to use *aql*” was one of the most important messages of the Quran. He thought that memorising alone is not enough. “One must also try to inquire and reflect on why and how things are as they are”.

## Primary education in Sujani and Charbagh

### Sujani school

Sujani school is a government primary school. The district and provincial representatives of the Ministry of Education are responsible for school supervision, teacher placement and salaries and provision of school supplies. The school is located just outside the core village. At the time of the study the school building was a simple mud house built by the villagers<sup>165</sup>. It had six, quite small classrooms and a headmaster office that also was used as a teachers’ room. Each classroom had a door and a quadrangular opening in the wall to allow for daylight to enter. An international NGO had more than a year earlier promised to supply the school with windows but only wooden frames without glass had been delivered so far. In front of the building was a large open area. It was the school yard and next to it was a well with a water pump. Close by there was a small house with six latrines, which had been constructed recently by another international NGO. All the boy classes, nine in total, were housed inside the building except grades one and grade five. The boys in these classes were sitting outside in the open air. The three girl classes were lodged in three big tents, which were raised at the far end of the schoolyard. Organising the school in two shifts thus allowing the girls to be taught inside the school building was considered impossible since, according to the teachers, the girls’ parents, would not accept such an arrangement. Many girls had quite a

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<sup>165</sup> In spring 2006 a new school building was under construction.

distance to walk to school and must, according to custom, be accompanied by their brothers. If the girl students did not attend school at the same hours as their brothers they would have to walk alone, which would most likely have excluded them from going to school at all. Mixed classes had never been considered as an option.

Thirteen teachers were employed in Sujani school. One of these was female. In addition, the school had a headmaster, who also taught a few hours per week. Nine of the male teachers had graduated from secondary school (grade 12) while the others had left after grade nine or ten. The woman teacher had studied up to grade nine. Two of the male teachers also had a complete Islamic education from *madrasa* studies in Pakistan. None were trained professionally as teachers but four male teachers had attended a two week teacher training course provided by UNICEF in 2003. Two teachers were presently enrolled in an in-service teacher training programme at a Teacher Training College in the province capital and attended classes twice a week in the afternoons.

A total of 834 students, 561 boys and 273 girls, were registered in the Sujani primary school<sup>166</sup>. This implies that 69 per cent of the students were boys and 31 per cent were girls. The school had, as mentioned, restarted in the spring of 2002 after a long period of closure or irregular operation. The girl school started for the first time ever in 2002 (except for a very short period in 1978) and the first cohort of girl students had, in April 2004, just started in grade three. Some of the boys had studied elsewhere and not all had had to begin in grade one when the school started in 2002. Therefore, the boy classes comprised grades one to six. In grade one there were 144 girls and 154 boys enrolled in two classes. However, some 40 - 50 of these children were registered as *fakhri*, not officially enrolled as they were too young, only five to six years old. Comparing the first grades the balance between boys and girls was almost equal. In grade two there was a shift, girls constituted 35 per cent and boys 65 per cent of all enrolled students. This imbalance became more pronounced in grade three where only 25 per cent of the students were girls.

**Table 12.1: Registered students in Sujani school April 2004**

Grade	Girls	Boys
<b>1</b>	144	154
<b>2</b>	67	123
<b>3</b>	62	185
<b>4</b>	-	62
<b>5</b>	-	20
<b>6</b>	-	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>561</b>

<sup>166</sup> In the surveyed families there were altogether 611 children of primary school age. The registered number of children in the school included over-aged children (the oldest was 22 years old!) as well as children from satellite villages.

There were at total of nine boy classes and three girl classes. The boys in grade one, all in one section, had no classroom but were sitting on the ground in the open air with the school wall at front and a mud wall along one side. On the wall, a black painted square served as a blackboard. A piece of fabric was attached as a roof to provide protection from the sun. One textbook for the teacher, a piece of chalk and a tree twig (occasionally used to slightly hit the boys) were the only teaching aids. The headmaster had requested additional teachers so as to divide the boys into two more sections but that had not been approved. The boys in grade three were divided into three classes. The classrooms were furnished with simple desks made by a local carpenter. As in other Afghan schools the desks were made as one set with a table and a bench suitable for two students. In Sujani school, there were often three and even four students sitting together on the bench. The boys in grade five were taught outside and they had to bring the furniture in and out every day. The girls in grade one and two sat on the tent floor while grade three girls had the same type of school furniture as the boys. The temperature in the tents was next to unbearable, particularly in the tent of grade three girls. The tent walls in grades one and two were rolled up but in grade three they were down in order to shut the girls off from possible onlookers. All classes were extremely overcrowded except the boy classes in grades four to six. Children sat very close to each other. There was no space for the teacher to walk around. In one class the teacher had to stand in the doorway since there was no space for him even to enter!

In grade one there were 154 boys and 144 girls enrolled. Evidently, several students were younger than age seven. However, the teachers were of the opinion that 20 students more or less did not make any difference since the total number was far too many in any case. "Many will repeat the grade next year and then they will have become accustomed to the school, which is an advantage" was the justification he made. Obviously, all enrolled students were not present every day. According to the headmaster daily absences amounted to some 40 per cent<sup>167</sup>.

Officially the school started at 8.00 but there were children who arrived after that time and thus teaching was delayed, sometimes up to an hour. The curriculum called for five lessons per day as a norm but at the Sujani school the day ended at around eleven o'clock. Thus, the students spent only about two hours per day in school<sup>168</sup>.

Two months after school had started the textbooks had not yet arrived. In 2003, the textbooks on hand sufficed for around half of the students. Books in Islamic subjects had not been provided at all<sup>169</sup>. We observed how the teacher copied the text from the one textbook he had on the blackboard. The students then read the text aloud and sometimes also reproduced it in their notebooks. Stationery is not provided by the

<sup>167</sup> A study conducted in the fall of 2005 (Karlsson, 2005) found the average daily absenteeism to be 30 per cent.

<sup>168</sup> This is not unique for Sujani school. Delayed starts and premature endings were normal in the surveyed schools of the above mentioned study.

<sup>169</sup> USAID was financing printing and distribution of textbooks and since religious books as a principle are never supplied by USAID the Afghan children did not get Islamic books.

government. The preceding year a NGO had provided notebooks and pens but during the current year the students had to purchase stationery themselves. Not all parents could afford this expenditure.

The girls wore their traditional dresses but the boys and the male teachers wore long trousers and shirts (sometimes with jackets or sweaters due to the cold). This was in accordance with the government decree that orders males not to wear traditional clothes in school (or any government workplace). A 13 years old boy explained:

We must be dressed like this so it is visible that we are school students. Otherwise you cannot tell the difference between a student and a farmer. And if the school inspector comes ... he came here once and one of the teachers had *shalwar kameez* that day. The inspector asked him why. The teacher was ashamed and so were we... We don't want to feel shame ....

In general, the ambience in Sujani school among teachers and students as good. This was also true of the relationships among the students, which can be described as gentle and friendly. The teachers were mostly kind and nice to the students. They often smiled and talked calmly and softly to the students.

## Charbagh schools

In Charbagh, the girl and the boy schools were located in separate buildings and were some 600 to 700 meters apart. There were as many girls as boys enrolled in the two primary schools, which is remarkable considering the national average. On the national level, 33 per cent of the primary school students were girls in 2004. Both schools included secondary classes in addition to the primary level. The primary schools had been supported by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) for more than ten years. The support included salaries for teachers and headmasters, textbooks and stationery for students, and supervision and teacher training courses. Moreover, the school buildings had been constructed by the SCA<sup>170</sup>.

### *Charbagh Girl School*

The school, a white painted building, was constructed around a quadrangular schoolyard with the entrance gate in one of the side walls. Outside the gate sat an aged doorman. On the backside, were a row of latrines and a well with a hand pump. All classrooms had windows (with glass) and furniture for students and teachers. Each classroom had

<sup>170</sup> In 2005, SCA handed over most of the schools it supported to the government. Charbagh girl school is "twinning" to a Swedish school. The students of the respective schools exchange letters and drawings. The Swedish school contributes with some minor funds to the Afghan school. Some 15 "twin schools" still receive support from the SCA. The boy school has not received Swedish support since 2005. The secondary levels of both schools are (as before) financed by the Ministry of Education.

a big blackboard. All the students had received textbooks, stationery and schoolbags. There were a total of 20 classes, taught in two shifts<sup>171</sup>. There were 16 female teachers employed at the primary level. They were supervised by one male headmaster and one female deputy headmaster. A majority of the teachers had participated in a one month in-service training course provided by the SCA. The primary grades consisted of 17 classes with 1,281 registered girl students. The secondary level went up to grade nine but the headmaster (and the girls!) hoped to expand to grade twelve as the girls passed the grades the coming years.

**Table 12.2: Registered girl students in Charbagh school  
December 2004**

Grade 1	Gr 2	Gr 3	Gr 4	Gr 5	Gr 6	Total
233	440	270	197	76	65	1 281

According to the registration books, many classes were overcrowded. In one section of grade two, for example, there were 146 students registered and in grade five 76 girls were enrolled. However, many students were absent so the actual number of students per class ranged from 22 to 65. According to the headmaster, all grades but particularly grades one and two included repeaters and to an even greater extent students who probably had left school but remained as registered students (the system for registration will be explained below).

The girls were all dressed in a kind of uniform, typical for many Afghan girl schools: a black coloured calf long gown or dress above long trousers and a white head scarf. The girls as well as the teachers arrived punctually. The teachers had to show up at the headmaster's office before going to the classrooms. Latecomers were not allowed. If a girl arrived late she was stopped at the gate by the guard and registered as absent. A friendly atmosphere between the teachers and the girls seemed to be the rule in the school. The female teachers were considerably younger than their male counterparts in the boy school<sup>172</sup>. The teachers were organised in a "school *shura*" with the headmaster as chairman<sup>173</sup>.

<sup>171</sup> That two shifts were accepted in Charbagh was probably due to the fact that most girl students lived in the neighbourhood of the school.

<sup>172</sup> At the national level, the female teaching force is younger than the male (Karlsson, 2005).

<sup>173</sup> The *shura* had for example decided that a teacher was allowed to be absent one day per month without salary deduction and without reporting to the provincial authorities but when absent more than one day the salary was deducted and the money put into a school fund. The fund had paid for new windows for the school.

### *Charbagh Boy School*

The school is located on a plateau on the outskirts of the village. The huge school building has no surrounding wall. At the time of the study, only the secondary students had proper indoor classrooms. More than half of the boys, students of grades one to six, were taught outdoors. They sat on the large plain on small plastic mats and were vulnerable targets for the dusty winds. In front of each class was a small blackboard that was supported by a stand or a bicycle. (Hundreds of bicycles were parked beside the schoolyard). A new building was under construction<sup>174</sup>. A water well with a hand pump and latrines were available. The school included more than 2,000 students; out of these almost 1,300 at the primary level. The school was running two shifts with 30 male teachers. The average age of the teachers seemed quite high: a great majority were “whitebeards”. All the teachers had attended the SCA teacher training course. Virtually all had completed secondary education and many had studied several years in *madrasas*. Textbooks and stationery had been distributed free of charge to all students by the SCA.

**Table 12.3: Registered boy students in Charbagh school  
December 2004**

Grade 1	Gr 2	Gr 3	Gr 4	Gr 5	Gr 6	Total
208	242	317	220	182	113w	<b>1 282</b>

As mentioned, there were an equal number of girls and boys in the two schools but the girl school had fewer sections. There were 17 girl and 27 boy classes. Thus, the boy classes were less congested. On average, 47 students were registered per class but since all students were not present every day, the classes were reasonably sized. The reason for the fewer number of classes in the girl school was likely due to the higher number of registered but not participating students (“permanently absent”, see below). Fewer classes also meant that they did not require as many teachers as the boy school. The difficulty in recruiting female teachers might also have played a role. In comparison to Sujani there was also a difference in teacher distribution in the boy school. While the SCA provided four teachers for 211 registered boys in grade one, the government allowed only one teacher for 152 boys in Sujani.

The majority of the boys and all the teachers had rejected the government orders and were dressed in the traditional *shalwar kameez*. Hard discipline and a sense of fear were predominant in most classes. The teachers frequently used the stick. Students were beaten with several strikes on their backs. Sometimes a boy had to show his palms so as to allow the teacher to strike them with a big ruler. Often the punishment was distributed for negligible misbehaviour or for not knowing the correct answer to a question posed by the teacher. In Sujani school there was a twig or a branch of a tree at

<sup>174</sup> In the spring of 2006 the building was completed and all students had indoor classrooms.



hand in all classrooms but it was never, to our observation, used to deliberately beat the children, as was the case in Charbagh. The Sujani headmaster, with the help of a twig, acted as a shepherd collecting his flock in the mornings to bring latecomers to classes. The teachers in Sujani used a twig to order and discipline the students and sometimes to scare or threaten them. This cannot, however, be compared to the constant and deliberately violent use we observed in Charbagh<sup>175</sup>.

## Primary school – for how long?

### Absence and dropout

To calculate ‘educational wastage’, for example, to assess the drop out rate, UNESCO (1998) prescribes either a longitudinal study of a pupil cohort through a full educational cycle or a retrospective study of school records to trace the flow of students through the grades over a certain time period. However, as UNESCO points out, such studies are not only time consuming and costly but also require reliable data. Therefore, drop out and repetition rates are usually estimated by using enrolment data for at least two consecutive years. The number of students in grade one in a given year is compared with the number of remaining students during the following years. This is actually also a retrospective study but simpler than the type mentioned above. The “main weakness [of this method] is that it ignores repetition, so this method is appropriate only for countries that practice automatic promotion” (p. 14). It also ignores sudden or high influx of students to a school, which has happened, for instance, in Afghanistan due to refugee returns, internal migration and rapid increase in access to education. The particular rules that are applied in grade promotion further complicate the situation so that assessing the drop out and repetition rates in Afghan primary schools poses a real challenge.

Sujani school started, as mentioned, in March 2002 but registration and attendance rates as well as information from examinations were not documented properly until 2003. In Charbagh, information on enrolment, absenteeism, student achievements, etc. has been collected for a long time but due to the turbulent years of 2001-02, which affected the village considerably, accurate information was not available. The only obtainable information was for post 2002. Thus in order to be able to discuss drop out rates in the schools; we collected additional information in the spring of 2006. The following account is based on data from 2003 to 2006. In order to understand how grade promotion works, it is first necessary to provide some basic information about the regulations that guide passing and repetition in Afghan primary schools.

A student who is absent more than what is allowed (maximum 50 per cent of

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<sup>175</sup> We have visited hundreds of schools in Afghanistan before this case study but have never before come across a school with such an ambience.

the time in grades 1 – 3 and 25 per cent in grades 4 - 6), or a student who does not participate in the annual examination or a student who has quit school during the school year is considered *mahroom*; s/he is denied the right to continue to the next grade, or, in other words, this student has dropped out of the current year. However, the student is allowed to come back another year. He or she may repeat the school year and has the right to do so within three years. This rule also applies to students who fail final grade examinations. For up to three years the student can continue to be registered in the grade to which s/he belongs. This implies that the registration or enrolment data does not only include children who are actually students during the current year. After three years, if the student has not come back s/he is expelled from school and only then can s/he be considered as a student who has dropped out. Here is an example: A student, after passing the first three years in primary school, may fail the grade four examination the fourth year, stay at home the next year, repeat grade four the sixth year and pass, fail the grade five exam the seventh year, stay at home the eighth and ninth year, repeat grade five the tenth year and then pass the grade conditionally, that is, will get a second chance before next semester starts...and so on! These conditions make it extremely difficult to determine the average annual drop out rate per grade without several years of follow up of each and every student who has been absent more than what is permitted (50 or 25 per cent depending on grade), or who has not participated in the final examinations, or who has failed or who has taken a “time out” for a year or two.

Therefore, the number of students who remain in class at the end of the school year is used here as a proxy indicator for the drop out rate. In other words, the *grade completion rate* provides a reverse indication of the drop out rate. As seen in Table 12.4, on average 20 to 25 per cent of the boys did not complete the school year. In Sujani and Charbagh 25 and 35 per cent of the girls respectively were absent too much to pass or did not participate in the final examination for other reasons<sup>176</sup>.

**Table 12.4: Average grade completion rate/participation rate in final examinations, grades 1 – 6, in Sujani and Charbagh schools, 2003 - 2006; percentage.**

		2003	2004	2005	2006	Average 2003 - 2006
<b>Sujani</b>	<b>Boys</b>	72	71	78	65	72
	<b>Girls</b>	57	87	86	71	75
<b>Charbagh</b>	<b>Boys</b>	85	83	84	74	82
	<b>Girls</b>	76	69	54	61	65

<sup>176</sup> The estimated national average of the drop out rate is 20 per cent according to the Department of Planning, Ministry of Education.

Charbagh boys drop outs were less than 20 per cent per year except in 2006 when the figure is higher. There are several possible reasons for the decrease from 85 per cent in 2003 to 74 per cent in 2006. Population mobility such as refugee returnees and families who moved to cities in search of jobs may have affected the rate. Another reason may be that the catchment area of the Charbagh boy school had diminished since new schools had opened not far away. Other schools had expanded up to grade six or grade nine and may have taken over some of the Charbagh students.

That girls in Charbagh dropped out to a higher degree than in Sujani was, according to the headmaster, due to the fact that the school had to compete with other education opportunities for girls in the area. NGOs provided opportunities for attending so called accelerated learning classes, literacy classes, and religious schools and offered girls incentives such as cooking oil or biscuits for their participation. Other tempting alternatives were home schools in the girl's neighbourhood. The headmaster thought that the primary girl school was not functioning as well as before because of more irregular attendance. Moreover, in these new non-formal schools, the girls did not receive formal certificates, which would hamper their ability to continue their studies. That girls completed the school year to a lesser extent than boys did, or, in other words, their drop out rate was higher, is the most apparent explanation to the higher student-teacher ratio in girl school, which was mentioned previously.

In Sujani, additional schooling opportunities did not exist. The only school for girls was the primary school, and there, most girls continued to the next grade. The average drop out rate of Sujani girls was also less than for the boys, except in 2003. As mentioned, the school started in 2002 and at that time many over age girls were admitted but they quit after only one year (as there was no female teacher). This explains the high drop out figure of 2003.

Why did Sujani girls' complete their school year to a higher degree than girls in Charbagh or to boys both in Charbagh and Sujani? The parents in Sujani unanimously communicated their conviction that a female teacher was a prerequisite for girls' education (see next chapter). They were also aware of the unavailability of women with formal education who could be recruited as teachers. In 2004, it had been possible to recruit only one female teacher and she taught in grade three. In 2005, another woman teacher from a neighbouring village had been contracted, which allowed the girls to continue in grade four. This happened also in 2006, but the future situation was uncertain. Maybe the girls were more anxious to stay on as they realised the current year might be their last. Most likely, the majority of the girls would have to leave school if no female teacher could be recruited.

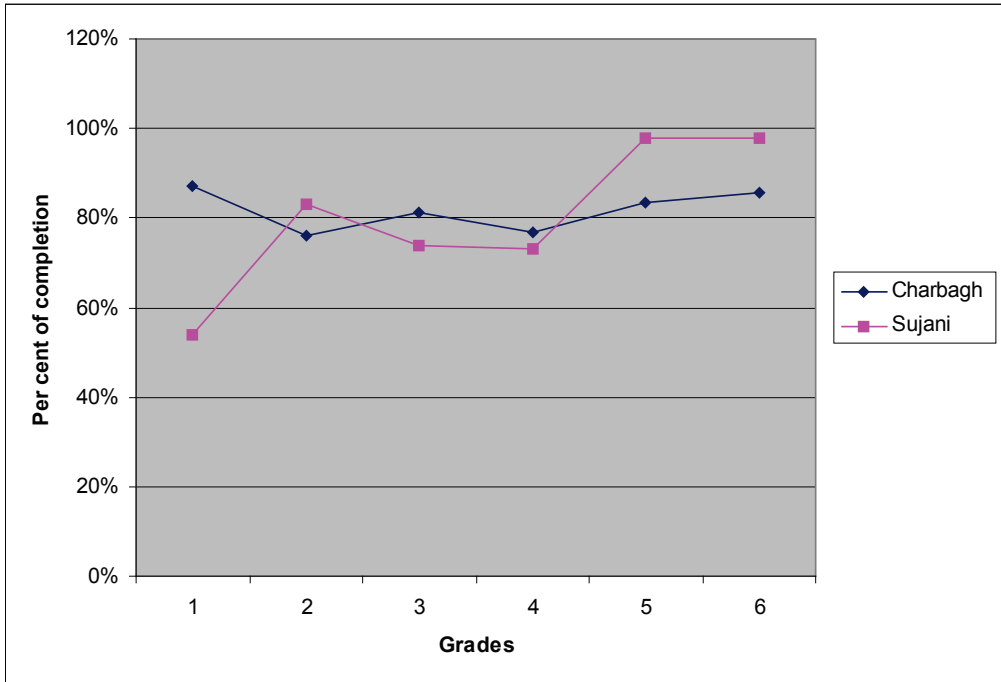
In Charbagh girls and boys were more or less equal in number in the primary schools, while in Sujani, girls constituted only one third of the total number of students<sup>177</sup>. They represented a certain selection of all girls in the village. Maybe they were daughters of parents with a particular interest in education. The fact that they

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<sup>177</sup> Comparison is made between grades 1–3 since grades 4–6 did not exist for girls in 2004.

as group represented a selection of girls may be another explanation of their higher retention rate.

When did students drop out? This question can be put in another way, for example: Did students complete some grades to a higher degree than they completed others? First we compare the two boy schools, see Figure 12.1.



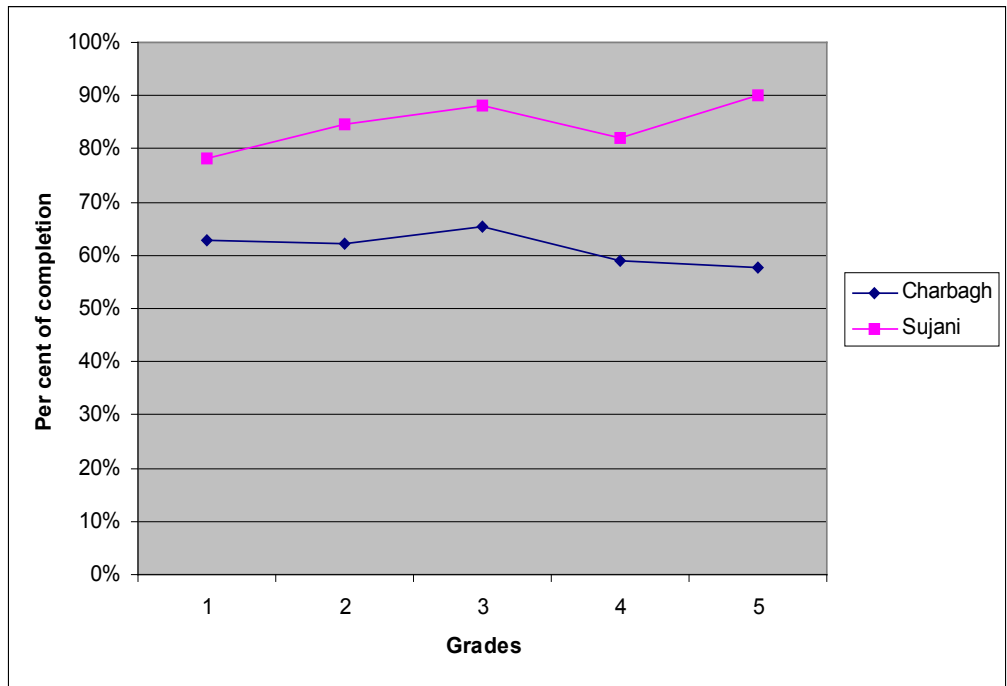
**Figure 12.1: Boys in Sujani and Charbagh schools:  
Average grade completion rate 2003 – 2006.**

In Sujani only around half of the boys completed grade one while in Charbagh almost all boys passed onto grade two. The reason might be found in the overcrowded class in Sujani, which also included many under age boys. The tendency in Sujani to complete the school year to a higher degree in grade five and six is to some extent also found in Charbagh. As shown in the Table 12.5, there is a decline of grade completion rate in Charbagh in 2006, particularly for grades 1 - 4, compared to the previous years. This decline is not found in Sujani. It was not possible to get any explanation for this event.

**Table 12.5: Boys in Sujani and Charbagh who completed grades 1 - 6 in 2003 – 2006; percentage.**

Grades	Sujani				Charbagh			
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2003	2004	2005	2006
1	51	53	66	46	86	96	92	76
2	86	77	81	89	83	86	75	61
3	83	79	68	66	88	80	82	76
4	56	58	89	89	79	76	83	69
5	100	100	94	98	88	72	88	85
6	100	100	94	97	86	83	88	86

If we look at the girls the following picture emerges (see Figure 12.2 and Table 12.6).



**Figure 12.2: Girls in Sujani and Charbagh schools:  
Average grade completion rate 2003–2006.**

Sujani girls were absent to a smaller extent than girls in Charbagh in all grades; thus, they completed the grades to a higher degree. In 2006, girls in Sujani had reached grade five. When the average completion rate for grades 1 through 5 in both villages is compared, girls in Sujani had an average of 84.6 per cent compared to 61.4 per cent for Charbagh girls. In grade six, however, an average of 72 per cent of the girls in Charbagh completed. The decline of boys' completion rate in the year 2006 is not found for girls in Charbagh. Rather, such a decline seems to have been going on for several years in the girl school. Possible reasons have already been discussed.

**Table 12.6: Girls in Sujani and Charbagh who completed grades 1- 6 in 2003 – 2006; percentage**

Grades	Sujani				Charbagh			
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2003	2004	2005	2006
1	45	75	97	97	77	73	54	48
2	72	100	85	81	77	71	51	48
3		100	79	86	73	63	56	69
4			82	82	80	48	45	63
5				90	49	69	43	70
6					68	72	71	78

The general tendency for both boys and girls is that the completion rate increases with the grades. In the higher grades, students drop out/do not participate in final exams to a very small extent. This tendency is even clearer for the completion rate of the grades above grade six in Charbagh. In the secondary grades, it is evident for boys and girls alike. An annual drop out rate of 25 per cent implies that quite a few students would remain in school by grade five. However, although the situation is serious it is not that bad. To find the grade completion rate, the number of students who participated in final examinations/completed the school year was compared with the total number of registered students. As mentioned, this latter number includes students who have dropped out at any time during the last three years. Some of these may have no intention whatsoever of returning to school but they are still registered. Therefore, although the grade completion rate is the closest we can come to understanding students' drop out rates, it entails a certain and inevitable exaggeration. There were still students in grade five, although the number of students tended to shrink annually.

With the exception of the girls in Sujani, many students left after grade three. This finding indicates that boys as well as girls tend to leave school before completion of the primary cycle. It may be the case that not only girls drop out prematurely as is generally assumed (Government of Afghanistan, 2005)<sup>178</sup>.

<sup>178</sup> According to UNESCO (1998) a student should complete grade five to achieve sustainable literacy.

## Failure and repetition

So far, we have discussed the rate of grade completion of, on the one hand, students who had been present the time stipulated in grades 1 through 3 or, on the other hand, students who had participated in the final examinations in grades 4 through 6. For the latter group, it is interesting to know whether they passed the examination or not.

Until recently, students were tested via annual end of year examinations in each subject. In order to be entitled to continue to the next grade, the student had to achieve a minimum score of 35 per cent. If not, the student “failed” and had to repeat the same grade the next school year. In 2003 examinations in grades 1 through 3 were cancelled and now progress to the following grade is based on the teacher’s evaluation. Thus, passing to the next grade in the lower grades is not based on students’ examination results but depends on the student’s presence and the teacher’s general assessment. Normally, students pass if they have been present the required amount of time, that is, at least 50 per cent. From grade four there are still final examinations in each subject. Those who fail are expected to repeat the grade next year.

Data from Sujani and Charbagh schools on students’ pass rates show that no student in the lower grades failed due to examinations - for obvious reasons. In the Sujani boy school, less than two per cent in the upper grades failed their examinations in 2002 and 2003. In 2004, the number was conspicuously higher: 48 per cent did not pass. All except one of those who failed this year were fourth grade students. Similar figures are found in Charbagh: out of 182 boys who participated in grade four examinations, one third failed. The teachers believed these results to be the outcome of the withdrawn examinations in the lower grades. The teachers were very concerned that practically all students were allowed to pass from grade three to four without being tested. In their view, students had not achieved what was required in the early years and therefore were not able to follow the teaching in grade four. This was their conclusion as to why the repetition rate for grade four students had increased so considerably. The girls had better results. No girl failed in grade four examinations in Sujani. In Charbagh about 22 per cent failed.

It is generally assumed that students who fail in examinations in Afghan schools repeat the grade the next year. This assumption was confirmed in Sujani and Charbagh. Only rarely, is failure taken as an excuse to leave<sup>179</sup>. The teachers said that students who fail once seldom become dropouts but those who fail several times usually quit school for good. Therefore, the grade completion rate or examination participation rate is a better indicator of the drop out rate than it may first appear.

The reasons for absenteeism or dropping out are not a particular focus of this study. Dropping out of school can have many reasons. One mother had no other reason to explain why her daughter had to quit school than referring to her husband:

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<sup>179</sup> A study in 1999 found the repetition rates to cause a primary cycle of six years to take on average 11 years to complete (Mansory, 2000)

“my husband decided that she must quit after grade three”. Another mother explained that her girl was “too big” to continue and was needed in the household. Sons also have to leave school when their labour is needed. Bilal, 15 years old said: “I was in school up to grade four and then I had to stop. I wanted to restart but my father did not allow me to. We need to work as farmers and support our family”. Such reasons are generally considered legitimate by all villagers. We also heard about more odd motives. NGOs or UN organisations like the World Food program sometimes distribute, for example, cooking oil to girls as a means to attract them to school. This had been the case, as mentioned, in Charbagh but it could also turn out to have the opposite effect. One father explained that a neighbour mocked or accused him for only being interested in the oil his daughter brought back from school and not for educating her. He then got so angry that he withdrew his girl from school!

If dropping out is accepted when explained by the family’s need of child labour, repeating a school year is linked to shame and disgrace. According to the students, repetition becomes necessary when a student has not studied hard enough. Anisa, a 13 year old girl, explained that it is a shame to repeat since “that means that the student has been lazy.” Saliha, aged 13, was convinced that a student who has to repeat “didn’t study enough”. It is a shame for the one who repeats, said Zabit, a 12 year old boy, because “all people laugh at him and he has wasted one year”. Only one student thought the reason for failure in examination and subsequent repetition could be lack of personal ability. When asked whose fault it is, when a student has to repeat, most students were of the opinion that the blame was entirely the student’s. “It is the student’s own fault, not the teachers. The teacher has taught but the student has not learned,” declared Sahak, a 14 year old boy. The parents also thought it was shameful if their son or daughter had to repeat a school year. However, they did not always share the idea that it was the student’s own fault. Some of the guilt must be put on the parents. “Parents are to blame,” stated one father. Another father was of the same idea: “Parents must make them [the children] attentive to homework and parents must help them”. Thus, teachers were without responsibility for a student’s failure also in the parents’ minds. All teachers with one exception found repetition to be a disgrace and believed it was caused by the student himself: “Now I have three students who don’t learn anything” said one old male teacher, “I am trying and trying but they don’t learn anything. So of course it is their fault if they have to repeat”. A very young woman teacher, who had just recently left school thought differently, and first said: “It is not a shame. When a student has to repeat it is the teacher’s fault”. But then she added (maybe remembering that she no longer was a student): “No, I mean it is the student’s fault. She has not studied enough”.



## Teaching in the Primary Schools

As before, when the teaching in the mosque schools was discussed, only one account for both villages will be provided here when the teaching in the primary schools is examined. The differences between the schools refer mainly to teacher-student relations, as have been reported above. The activities in the classroom, the textbooks and the teaching techniques were very similar.

### Teaching and learning

Teachers taught either all subjects as in grades 1 - 3 or only one to two particular subjects as in grades 4 - 6. In total they taught 28 lessons per week. A handful of teachers in Charbagh but no one in Sujani said they were engaged in private tuition in their homes after or before school hours. One lesson lasted 45 minutes, and after two lessons a break of 10 - 15 minutes followed. Students were expected to be in the classroom before the teacher, and they usually were (with exception of the morning latecomers in Sujani). The teacher announced his or her arrival by knocking on the door or wall (if there was a classroom) before entering so as to give the students a chance to come to order and sit quietly at their desks (if they had any). Upon entering, the teacher mostly greeted the students politely and friendly. The students rose to their feet and answered in chorus. Similar procedures went on in practically all classrooms.

Almost all lessons followed the same routines regardless of subject, teacher or students. Sometimes the teacher started the lesson by writing the topic of the lesson on the blackboard but more often s/he just started by reading aloud a text from the textbook. At the beginning of the lesson the teacher commonly referred to the previous lesson to remind the students of what had been studied the day before. Another common activity, particularly in the lower grades, was a control of students' cleanliness. The students held out their hands, and the teacher moved around to check whether the students' hands were clean and nails were cut. We never heard or saw that students were scolded for not being clean enough. Thereafter, attendance was checked by calling out each student and ticking off their names in the big attendance book. Then the lesson started.

Teachers had two main aids: the blackboard and the textbook. Worksheets, exercise books, supplementary readers, or classroom libraries did not exist in any school. Several teachers made great efforts and relentlessly kept the lesson going. They constantly put forth questions, wrote on the blackboard, read the textbook, and corrected or commanded the students. They never rested. The teacher was the director of the play and in addition, the main actor. S/he took the major role while the students had the walk-on, non-speaking parts.

Mainly, the teachers were busy with three types of activities: reading, writing and posing questions. The teachers read aloud, a single word or more often, a whole phrase, with the intention that all students should repeat in chorus. This was often a very loud exercise: students shouted rather than read aloud. They were supposed to follow the text in their textbooks but even if they had the books with the correct page spread out, they often just reiterated the words read by the teacher without looking at the text. The same phrases were repeated over and over again. Sometimes the teacher read the text s/he had written on the blackboard and students were asked to repeat after him/her, all in unison or one at a time.

The teachers wrote with a piece of chalk on the blackboard. The words (or numbers if it was a math lesson) were repeated aloud. At times the students reproduced the same numbers, words or phrases in their notebooks. Students were commonly asked to write on the blackboard too. The blackboard was seldom clean, which resulted in poor contrast of the written text. Students with poor vision must have had difficulty reading. We did not see any student who wore glasses (not astonishing though, considering the widespread poverty).

The teacher's questions were usually of two types. Most common was a question that required the students to recall a fact and provide an answer from memory. Another common type of question required a yes or no response. A very frequent question was: *Fomiden* (do you understand)?' All the students answered: 'Yes!' Very rarely did the teachers ask why-questions or questions that were related to students' everyday life. We never heard a question that requested the students to explain or reason about something.

When the teacher posed a question, the students raised their hands to answer. Usually very many students, around half or more, wanted to answer. The teacher pointed at a student to answer without first addressing him or her by name (in the grades 4 - 6 the teacher may not have known all the names). Often s/he addressed a student first and then posed a question, a routine that seemed to make some students feel ill at ease. The lesson ended by the bell (a sound made by the school guard on a piece of metal, for example a worn mortar shell as in Sujani). The textbooks were closed. The teacher assigned homework, the same to all students. It was usually a reading or writing exercise as yet another repetition of the lesson. In the Lesson Progress Book the teacher noted which page of the textbook had been reached during the lesson.

The classroom teaching was aimed at reaching all the students at the same time. The same activity was intended for everyone and meant to be carried out simultaneously. However, in the overcrowded classrooms it was impossible for the teacher to get in touch with all the pupils. Frequently, only the first rows of students were 'present' in the sense that they were listening to and answering the questions. In classes of 50 to 60 students or more, teachers seldom posed questions to students in the back of the classroom. Back there a lot of other activities were taking place, which many teachers did not see or chose not to see. Small talk, exchange of toys or other items, chatting

and planning for the break as well as quarrels, threats and small fights occurred. More often, however, there was just passivity. That seemed to be the best option for students who did not want to attract the teacher's attention. Students just sat. The boy classes in grades 4 through 6 in Sujani represent a contrasting exception. These classes were small: in grade six only 10 to 15 students were present. The teacher sometimes sat down in the middle of group and the teaching took a more conversational form.

In the lowest grades, most students were attentive only during the first half of the first lesson of the day. The more time passed, the more concentration was lost. Uneasiness spread. The teacher had to struggle to maintain some kind of order, at least among the first rows of students. His or her means included shouting, threatening, pleading, or beating. Another option was to give up on the students behind the first rows. In the lower grades, an older student often assisted the teacher in maintaining discipline. Students' high absenteeism and the irregular attendance complicated the teaching further.

Many teachers had incorporated concepts such as "child centred learning" in their vocabulary. They celebrated group work and students' active learning as "good and modern teaching methods". They viewed 'learning by doing' as the best way of learning. Even teachers who had never attended teacher training courses had caught these buzz words and believed that "practice and experience [to be] the best methods". Somewhat contradictory, they also judged their most frequently used technique, teacher questioning, as the best method. However, one primary school teacher felt sorry that no other options than the ones practised existed: "Big, overcrowded classes and lack of facilities limit the training of practical skills in our schools. The only practical activities we have are the sports lessons".

## The language issue

In many Third World countries the language of instruction in school is the language of the former colonial power and not a national language, which has created many problems for children and teachers. In Afghanistan, the language in schools presents a problem too but for other reasons. According to the constitution, all children have the right to be taught in their mother tongue in primary school. Textbooks are printed in the two official languages, Dari and Pashto. Large areas of the country are not ethnically and linguistically homogenous and therefore, a child may have a different mother tongue than his/her classmate living next door. There may be several mother tongues represented in a class. Nonetheless, central educational authorities determine which language is the dominating one in each area and textbooks are provided accordingly, either in Dari or Pashto. In practice, the teacher's mother tongue determines the media

of instruction regardless of which textbooks have been distributed to the students<sup>180</sup>. Teachers are not always bilingual. For students, this situation causes a lot of problems. In Sujani as well as in Charbagh students had different language backgrounds, and particularly in Sujani they faced many problems. Here is an example from our observations:

The teacher in grade one had Pashto as his mother tongue. His students were Dari, Pashtu, or Uzbek speakers. The only textbook available was in Dari, a language the teacher had only poor command of. The teacher mistook the Dari male name Frokh to mean sell (frokht in Pashto) so the textbook sentence Ahmed gave a cock to Frokh was translated to the children as Ahmed sells his cock.

### The stick?

As mentioned, the stick was frequently used in the Charbagh boy school. Sometimes, but rarely according to our observations, was it in use in Sujani. An older student was equipped with a branch to keep the small children in order in Sujani classes, including the girl classes. Female teachers used this correction measure less frequently than male teachers. All teachers with one exception only (a male teacher) condemned the use of the stick, which was often contradicted by their own practice. A male teacher in Sujani explained: “Many believe it is good to beat children but I don’t believe so. When children are beaten they don’t come to school. Children hate teachers who beat them. They get scared and can’t learn”. One of the older teachers in Charbagh, who we observed beating boys in grade five for not knowing the answer to his questions, was also very clear on this point: “Beating is not good but a student can get other types of punishment, for example, extra jobs or the task to clean up the classroom”.

In 2004, the Ministry of Education issued a decree that prohibits corporal punishment in schools. The teachers in both villages were aware of this new regulation. The headmaster in Sujani, who used a branch to drive the students together in the mornings without directly hitting them, complained about the new edict. According to him, the stick should have a given place in the classroom at least as a reminder and a warning to the students. “Now”, he said, “it is very difficult to maintain discipline and order”.

Among the students there were disagreements on this point. Majabin, a girl in Sujani said that “children should not be beaten, beating is only for animals”. Khan, a Sujani boy in grade 5, aged 16, was of the same opinion, and added: “One cannot learn when one is scared. One gets sad then”. But others had opposite ideas, as Ghutey, a girl in grade 3, for example: “We learn better when we are beaten. I cannot say I dislike a teacher who beats us. Teachers have the right to beat students”. Several students shared

<sup>180</sup> In the schools in the refugee camps students were placed in classes in accordance to their preferred language and teachers were distributed accordingly.

this idea and thought as, for example, Sefat, a boy in Sujani: “We learn better when we are threatened” or “we try harder because we are afraid to be beaten ...we learn because we are afraid”. There was a certain difference between boys and girls on this issue. Boys had more tolerance with teachers who beat them. Some children were also beaten by their fathers. One father said:

We try to correct our children by words first but if it doesn't help we beat them also. But not so much. One of my sons is a bit *shukh* (naughty) so I have to beat him, sometimes as often as twice a week. I use a light twig and give him one beat only, not to frighten him too much.

Many teachers were ashamed if they were seen hitting a child, especially if they beat when in an uncontrolled mood. The Islamic schoolteachers were embarrassed when this issue was brought up. The mosque schoolteacher, his *taliban* colleagues and the imam in Sujani argued in a discussion: “There is no beating in the mosque school, only a little whipping”. They claimed that students learn best when they are encouraged, and whipping in the mosque school is “only to make them sit down, to be quite, to stay orderly, not make noise and so”.

## The teacher's role

After school, most teachers had a lot of other things to do. Many had another job such as farmer or shopkeeper. The female teachers had household and childcare responsibilities. No one can support a family on a teacher salary in Afghanistan. Teaching was regarded a charity rather than an occupation: “I see it as a national and Islamic obligation to work as teacher. The salary is for the expenses of one week at the most. I have my main income from my land”, declared one of the Sujani teachers. Another one said: “A teacher should feel responsibility for children and for society. He should see the job as a national and social responsibility. He should serve his people and country, help the young generation and see the job as *sadaqa*, sacrifice”.

The teachers saw themselves as models or examples. A female teacher in Charbagh explained: “A teacher should be punctual, should come to school every day and on time. A teacher should be well organised”. She continued:

A teacher should teach with love and kindness, not with the stick. She should help children who are sad or weak. She should encourage everyone because all can learn in due time. A teacher should console children and she should instruct them nicely. A child who is dirty should be given the opportunity to explain why and not be scolded immediately, for example.

Many teachers emphasised that having good relations with students is conducive to learning. Moreover, they frequently emphasised the role as value transmitter. As a teacher they should transfer Islamic values as well as national, Afghan values. Examples they mentioned included national pride and patriotism, independence, equity and freedom. To contribute to the conservation of the renowned Afghan hospitality as well as advocating for peace and tolerance were other examples they brought up as important values they as teachers should promote. A male teacher explained<sup>181</sup>:

The dominant values [we teach] are Islamic and are shared by everyone in our society, for example unity, honesty, respect to older people, equality and such things. Afghan values are also taught, for example through many good proverbs, such as this: “One’s tongue can be a fortress as well as a calamity”

Normally teachers seemed to like their profession. “I want to remain a teacher for the rest of my life. I have had other opportunities but I want to stay as teacher”, one of them said. Another told his future plans: “I want to continue my job and further my professional knowledge in courses and seminars”. Only one very young woman teacher who had had to leave school after grade nine wanted another job<sup>182</sup>:

I want to become an engineer, not a teacher. My mother says she has brothers who are engineers. Even if the salary was very high I would not like to remain as teacher. I don’t like being a teacher. Now I have to because there is no other job and there is no school for me where I can continue my studies. I hope to be able to further my studies so I can become something else. A teacher remains a teacher throughout life, so it has been for my mother. I don’t want that.

## Views on teachers

How did the students look upon their teachers? We avoided asking such a question directly and instead requested the students to define what in general constitutes a good teacher. A common answer was: “All teachers are good”. Such a response may indicate that the students thought they were asked to describe their current teachers, and since they did not want to get trouble by criticising them answered more diplomatically than honestly. It may also demonstrate the general view of the teacher as a representative of knowledge and therefore worthy of respect. This perception is believed to have its origin in Islam. The first teacher was the Prophet Mohammad who said, according to Bukhari’s *hadith* collection: “I am truly sent as a teacher”.

The one who possesses knowledge has the duty to transmit it to others. The teacher’s duty is to pass on to students what s/he knows. Since the teacher has had the

<sup>181</sup> This proverb tells you to be careful with what you say.

<sup>182</sup> By 2006 she had left her teaching job and got employment with a NGO.

opportunity to learn and study s/he has the obligation to share his information with others. A teacher is educated and therefore is expected to hold moral standards above the average. S/he is to act as a moral example for students. One of his/her main tasks is to instil in the students good behaviour and morals. The teaching profession is a mission (like the imam's) and not a profession (like for example the tinsmith's). One father said: "I expect my sons to study well and become teachers so that other people make doa for [ask Allah to bless] them and me... The teacher is a source of knowledge and teachers are highly respected"

"A good teacher is one who teaches from heart (*az delash*)" one girl explained, "one who really has the heart for teaching. She makes efforts to make us learn and she doesn't beat us." In general, the students appreciated a teacher who makes much an effort: "A good teacher tries and tries. He feels responsible for our learning and he makes many efforts." Definitions of a good teacher also included his or her relations with students. "Teachers should be good towards students. They should have good behaviour," said Zabih, an 18 year old boy. Qadeer aged 14, however, demanded more: "A teacher should teach with love".

Parents also had opinions on what constituted a good teacher. That teachers in Islamic schools should be experts on Islamic knowledge was a view shared by most parents. The primary school teacher was expected to have excellent knowledge about Islamic as well as *maktab* subjects. In addition, teachers should act as models and they should know how to teach children: "The *maktab* teacher must have subject knowledge and good conduct. It is very important that he is able to make children learn and understand" was the opinion of a father in Charbagh.

Parents, students and teachers were asked who is most important for a student's success in school: the teacher, the student or the parents. In most cases, the students shared the same view as the teachers, that is the student has the major responsibility for whether s/he will fail or succeed in school. Girl students, however, were willing to share this responsibility with the teachers. "Without a teacher it is impossible to learn," said Kamila, aged 13. Neither students nor parents would put a student's success or failure in school on the teacher's shoulders. Fathers and mothers thought that they themselves had the biggest share of responsibility for a student's achievements in school. As parents they were responsible for sending their children to school and therefore they saw their role as decisive for the student's accomplishments. One father remarked: "Parents are responsible and they should supervise their children all the time".

# Comparing *maktab* and *madrasa*

A comparison of the mosque schools and primary schools as observed in Sujani and Charbagh is provided in Table 12.7. Issues such as structure, curriculum, availability, teaching and learning activities, examination and promotion are compared. There is reason to question the stereotyped and negative characterisation connected to Islamic education. The ancient methods of Islamic education have been maintained in the mosque schools, of which many are of fundamental value. Instruction in mosque schools is not as obsolete as is generally believed. On the contrary, it includes pedagogical values that would be beneficial also in the primary schools, particularly the individual instruction techniques and allowing students to study in their own pace. Peer tutoring and activities similar to group work are other features of mosque education that appear ‘modern’. Moreover, memorisation as a learning technique may include qualities that today’s pedagogy tends to neglect.

The *maktab* school has a strict structure and organisation, which might be an advantage. Some of the Islamic books in the mosque school may benefit from language revision in order to adapt them to the language level of children. Both types of schools would likely benefit from teacher education.

**Table 12.7: *Maktab* and *madrasa* in Sujani and Charbagh from different perspectives**

	<i>Madrasa</i> (mosque school)	<i>Maktab</i> (primary school)
System/structure	<p>Falls under the Ministry of Pilgrimage and Endowments.</p> <p>Community based and funded.</p> <p>No formal monitoring and supervision. No reporting.</p> <p>No grades according to age or achievement level.</p> <p>Varying ages and levels in the same group.</p>	<p>Under the Ministry of Education.</p> <p>Financed by the government.</p> <p>Province and district officials control and supervise. Headmasters report regularly on attendance and textbook progress.</p> <p>Classes are organised by grade and level.</p> <p>Age segregation is the ideal but age variations are common in the same group.</p>



	<i>Madrasa</i> (mosque school)	<i>Maktab</i> (primary school)
Aim (according to parents)	To learn the basics of Islam. To learn good behaviour.	To become literate. To learn good behaviour.
Availability	Available for all children (mosques exist everywhere).  No admission procedures.	Not available for children in distant satellite villages, particularly not for girls. Registration is compulsory and required during a certain period of the year (but is in practice accepted any time).
Classrooms	Students sit on the floor in a circle or in rows in front of each other in the mosque.  The teacher sits on the floor, in the circle or in front of the students. The teacher moves around a lot.	Students sit in rows behind each other at desks (if available) in a school building, a tent or in the open air facing the teacher. The teacher stands in front of the class or sits at a teacher desk. The teacher seldom moves around in the classroom.
Students	Pre-school or older. Boys (up to adult age) and girls (up to 10-12 years) Co-education (as long as girls are pre-adolescents). Dressed in traditional clothes.	7-15 years (with a exceptions for older students).  Boys and girls in separate classes.  Boys obliged to wear trousers and shirts (but did not always). Girls sometimes wore uniform
Teachers	Imam or <i>talib</i> .  Male only (reason why girls must quit when adolescent). Educated mainly in <i>madrasa</i> but sometimes also in <i>maktab</i>	Trained or untrained in teaching profession. Male or female.  Educated mainly in secondary schools but sometimes also in <i>madrasa</i> (if male)

	<i>Madrasa (mosque school)</i>	<i>Maktab (primary school)</i>
Activities	<p>Reading, mostly silent, “ABC- books”, moral stories, and the Quran.</p> <p>Writing letters on slates, mostly instructed individually.</p>	<p>Reading textbooks, mostly in chorus.</p> <p>Writing, mostly copying text from blackboard or books.</p> <p>Counting, mostly coping from blackboard.</p>
Teaching	<p>Mostly individual instruction: teacher works with one student at a time.</p> <p>Peer tutoring: older student helps younger ones.</p> <p>Corporal punishment is not prohibited: a branch is used to scare and to hit.</p>	<p>Mostly whole class instruction. Older student may assist with twig to keep discipline in lower grades.</p> <p>Peer tutoring is not used.</p> <p>Corporal punishment is prohibited: still, a stick is used to beat or to frighten.</p>
Learning	<p>Learning is self-paced: students study at their own pace and study different books.</p> <p>Group work: students read together.</p> <p>Independent work: students memorise the Quran by themselves.</p>	<p>Students adhere to a defined pace of work; all study the same topic and material. Similar results are expected of everyone. Group work seldom exists.</p> <p>Individual study rarely occurs.</p>
School material	<p>Students use a slate and write with a piece of chalk.</p> <p>There is no blackboard.</p> <p>Students have preparatory reading books, Islamic books, books with moral stories and poems.</p> <p>Books are purchased privately.</p>	<p>Students use notebooks and write with pencils/pens and teacher writes with chalk on a blackboard.</p> <p>Students have textbooks in different subjects.</p> <p>Books are provided free of charge (but often delayed).</p>

	Madrasa (mosque school)	Maktab (primary school)
Examination and promotion	No formal tests. There is no final stage or level. Progress is in the hands of students: they continue to a new text when given material is mastered and demonstrated to the teacher.	Examinations in all subjects two times per year from grade four. Grade nine is the final stage. Presence as well as formal tests, given by the teacher and identical for all students, decide progress.
	There are no failures, no rejections, and no marks. No records are kept.	Students are labelled as passed or failed. Passed students get marks on their achievements in all subjects, ranging from 35 to 100, also on personal behaviour.
	Students come and go. They attend according to their preference and quit on their own or parents' request.	Repetition is required after a failed examination or with more than 50 % absenteeism; 25 % from grade four. After three years of non-attendance or repetition students are expelled. Students also drop out on their own or parents' request.
	No stigma for dropping out or slow learning.	Shame is attached to dropping out and repetition.
	Disabled children seldom attend; exception are blind children in <i>Dar-ul-hefaz</i> )	Disabled children seldom attend.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The current call for “community based education” or community participation in educational affairs was heard by the villagers in Sujani and Charbagh a long time ago: mosque education as well as other forms of Islamic education has always been organised and funded by the village inhabitants. Mosque education is available everywhere for all Afghan children.

The value of mosque education must be seen in the light of the needs of educating and socialising children into the Islamic community of which they are members (Boyle, 2004). The fact that mosque schools are available everywhere and practically all children attend is also valuable from the perspective of *maktab* education. Mosque education helps prepare children for primary school. The fact that mosque schools do not belong to the national educational system and do not fall under the Ministry of Education seems to indicate that the present educational policies in Afghanistan do not

recognise the significance of mosque education. Mosque schools can be considered as pre-schools or kindergartens. That said, the teachers would likely benefit from education in pedagogical techniques and child development.

Traditional forms of *madrasas* seem to be on the decline but other forms of Islamic education, such as *Dar-ul-hefaz* and Islamic education for girls, are expanding.

The government supported primary schools suffer from overcrowding, particularly in grades one to three. This fact may be one reason for the high drop out rate, which appears to be at peak at around grade four for both boys and girls. The high repetition rate in grade four indicates that the current system of automatic promotion in the lower grades may have resulted in lower achievement rates. When students are requested to be present only half the stipulated time and when school hours in practice amount to only two-thirds of the required hours per day, it is not astonishing that fourth grade teachers are so concerned about the quality of learning in the lower grades.



## Chapter Thirteen

### What is the Meaning?

Originally, this study focused on two major questions: one that referred to parents' choice of school for their children, *maktab* or *madrassa*, and another that concerned girls' participation or non-participation in education. As a result of the pre-study, and even more conspicuously after the first study in Sujani, it became obvious that parents very seldom chose only one type of school for their children. They usually preferred both. Neither did they separate their children so that one went to *madrassa* and another to *maktab* for example. Additionally, neither in Sujani nor in Charbagh was there any reason to ask why they did not send their girls to school – they did! (How many years a girl ought to go to school, was another issue that will be discussed in the next chapter). Consequently, the question was changed to why the parents sent their children to *both* types of schools and only in the few cases where this was not the case was the original question asked: which school have you chosen for your children and why?

This chapter describes how parents look upon education for their children, what they regard as important to learn and what outcomes they expect in the future. Students' ideas on these issues are also reported. The arguments for attending *maktab* or *madrassa*, respectively, are discussed as well as the reasons for not sending children to school at all. Finally the role of parents in education is elaborated upon. But first, we return to *adab* and *akhlaq*, two important concepts in education previously discussed in *Chapter 9 Education in Afghanistan*.

### To teach and to learn *adab* and *akhlaq*

As previously mentioned, *adab* has to do with social behaviour, about good conduct and nice manners towards other people, while *akhlaq* is associated with inner morals and ethics. Without denying the importance of facilitating relationships and attending to social norms, one can say that *adab* deals with the superficial aspects of human interactions, while *akhlaq* is more concerned with the profoundness of these interactions. The two concepts, however, overlap and are often used together in the same sentence. A person's *akhlaq* can be either good or bad while the concept of *adab* encompasses only good conduct. *Adab* is generally associated with children, something children should learn. *Akhlaq*, on the other hand, refers more to adult obligations.

"*Adab* is the most important thing to learn for everyone", declared one father. A teacher explained how education is thought to foster *adab*: "In our culture educated means '*ba adab*', a person with good manners, a good person. It is said also in the Holy

Quran that there is a difference between learned and not learned persons”<sup>183</sup>. Another respondent was of the opinion that there are great differences between literate and illiterate people as regards *adab*. One father said:

A young boy for example, if he is a school student he asks for permission before entering a room while an illiterate person just enters without even knocking. Also, the one who is literate has better language. An illiterate wife answers her husband in a disorderly way. She cannot explain things as well as literate women.

It is interesting to note that when asked if there was any difference between literate and illiterate mothers, the respondent laughed and said: “No. Mothers are mothers, they are the same with their children. It is a question about natural emotions not about literacy”.

“*Adab* is about good conduct. For example, when you meet somebody on the way, you can speak and act with good manners”, a villager informed. Several respondents highlighted that how to greet others in a proper way is an important part of *adab*. One father put it like this: “In the *madrassa* I want my children to learn to say salam when they meet elders and when they go into the mosque”.

Good *akhlaq* is associated with a person who carries out his or her obligations in an ethical way and for a child these obligations are related to their parents. A boy should assist his father in agriculture work, such as sowing and harvesting or as a shepherd for the family goats or sheep. A girl should help her mother with household activities such as cooking, baking and washing clothes and taking care of younger siblings. Children who run away from their duties or who do not perform them satisfactorily have bad *akhlaq*. Anisa, a girl aged 13, explained that she learned “to obey and respect my parents and my teachers. [*Akhlaq*] is to learn what is right and wrong, good and bad, to learn how to help our parents with housework, and to work hard with our school work”.

Children are encouraged to help older people and this duty is a life long responsibility in relation to their own parents. A son who does not work when adult, and therefore is unable to support his parents, is considered a person with very bad *akhlaq*. A son or a daughter, regardless of age, with good *akhlaq* is not only considered a good person in general, but is also honouring their father and mother.

*Adab* and *akhlaq*, however, are not only related to behaviour and obligations to other people but also to Allah. To fulfil the duties towards Allah requires praying and basic knowledge about Islam. Parents in Sujani and Charbagh regarded *adab* and *akhlaq* first of all as part of Islamic education, and often as the most important content of Islamic education. “In the *madrassa* children learn *adab* and *akhlaq*” was a frequently repeated phrase. A father in Charbagh said that in “the *madrassa* children learn how to become good Muslims”. But *adab* and *akhlaq* were also considered important elements

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<sup>183</sup> Quran 39:9

of *maktab* education: “*Maktab* makes us able to live our lives accountably (*hesab o ketab*)” said one father. When asked what he meant, he answered that “it is to learn to act responsibly towards other people, to my nearest family as well as to neighbours but also to Allah”. The father who earlier talked about the importance of saying *salam*, at first did not want to answer our questions at all, saying “I am just a simple man, I don’t know”. Later, however, he stressed the importance of *salam* in *maktab* education:

From *maktab* I also expect them [the children] to go home directly and to say *salam* to the teachers and also not to tear their clothes. They should learn to regard children from other villages as being the same as us, we who are from this village, they should have solidarity between each other.

Quite often parents requested more teaching about Islamic subjects, including ethics in the *maktab*. “There should be more Islamic subjects in *maktab*, previously there were more than today”, was a remark from one father. While one father in Sujani stressed that “religion is the most important in both *maktab* and *madrasa*” others emphasised the whole concept of moral education, like this father who believed that “in *maktab* they should learn *talim* and *tarbiya*, if they learn that they don’t do wrong things”.

Respondents displayed great trust in education, in *maktab* as well as in *madrasa*, as a means to create people with good morals and good conduct: “If we had been educated such disasters as we have experienced the last decades would not have happened. If there are people with *tarbiya* they can differentiate between good and bad” was a thought expressed by a female teacher in Charbagh. To teach *adab* and *akhlaq* was considered one of the main duties of all teachers. “In *madrasa* we learn *adab* and *akhlaq* from the mullah and in *maktab* we learn from the teacher, because they are *educated* people” [our emphasis] concluded a father. That this was a teacher’s responsibility was a view shared also by the teachers themselves. One teacher stated that “children should learn good morals from the teacher. A teacher should not only transfer knowledge but also teach morals”. Another teacher added:

For example, some students are Kohistani [an ethnic minority] and their parents are illiterate. These children must learn *akhlaq* in schools. It is the teacher’s responsibility to teach them what is right and wrong. The teacher and the mullah are the most important people.

A child who misbehaves in one way or another can often hear: “What has the teacher (or mullah) taught you!” which indicates that the *madrasa* as well as the *maktab* teachers are considered major instructors of moral education. However, the parents in Sujani and Charbagh viewed themselves as playing the key role with regards to inculcating good morals in their children. This commonly shared idea was summarised by a respondent who said that “parents must take this responsibility as children are at home most of the time”. One father added: “First of all, and ultimately, parents should tell them what to do and what is bad and what is good. To say *salam*, respect elders and so on”. No one



else but the parents could take this responsibility, he argued: “It is the father’s and the mother’s prime duty. If they don’t teach their children, children will be running here and there and make trouble for others”. Mothers were often seen as being the most important for moral education as was evident by such statements as the following made by a man who saw that “It starts from the mother. Children learn all basic things from the mother”.

“Where there is no *dab* there is no *adab*” is a common saying expressed by many respondents. ‘*Dab*’ is the sound that is heard from a beat or a slap. The belief that one cannot instil *adab* in a child without physical punishment was a view shared by many; by parents, teachers as well as by children and was described by one father who disclosed: “I punish them when they do something wrong. I instruct them and correct them all the time. I guide and supervise them but sometimes I also beat them, by slapping them in their faces”. Another father, who was a teacher and imam in another village, referred to Islam to justify that he beat his children: “Of course I beat my children, it is said in Islam that you should hold your stick over the children”. When Amir asked if holding the stick meant beating with the stick, he responded, fidgeting with the brim of his *pakol* (Afghan cap):

No, not literally, but it means that one should be attentive and teach them to avoid bad habits. Sometimes I beat them when I get angry, I slap them with my open hand but usually I try to correct them by talking to them. But sometimes I do beat them. Yes.

Others, both parents, children and teachers strongly opposed that ‘*dab*’ was necessary to instil ‘*adab*’. One father in Charbagh, a day worker with 11 years of *maktab* education, opposed the custom to punish children and he also referred to Islam: “Beating children is completely prohibited according to Islam.... One should only instruct and correct them. I have been married for 13 years and I have never had any problem with my children. Beating children is *haram*”.

## Two schools – two types of knowledge

*Maktab* and *madrassa* were seen as houses of diverse knowledge. Everyone was certain on the differences and looked upon the two educational systems as representatives of two kinds of knowledge. In the *madrassa* resides the Islamic knowledge, which many respondents referred to as “spiritual” in contrast to the “material” knowledge that lives in the *maktab*. Islamic knowledge is revealed from Allah; “the knowledge [in *madrassa*] has come from Allah and we want to live in accordance with Allah”, said one father, while the knowledge children gain in school comes from “human experts and professionals”. A mullah believed differently: “The Quran is the source of all knowledge” [our emphasis]. The judge at the Supreme Court in Kabul had another

view. He suggested that “other types of knowledge [than the revealed knowledge of the Quran] are not alien or opposite to Islam. All kinds of knowledge, divine as well as human, aim at improving the present life as well as the next life”. Mohsini, a famous shia scholar, explained that contrary to what people believe “everything cannot be found in the Holy Quran. There only the principles are found”.

To exemplify the differences between the knowledge types, several respondents mentioned the different books, where “in the *madrasa* the book is from Allah while in the *maktab* the books are written by human beings”. One mother illustrated the difference like this: “*Madrasa* has the Quran while *maktab* has textbooks”. These perceived differences as regards the character of the knowledge in the two schools indicate that the respondents attached different goals and expected different outcomes of the two systems.

## For today, tomorrow and the day after tomorrow

The aim of education, according to one of the fathers, was “to learn both about Islam and things that are useful for daily life. Education should prepare us for our afterlife but also for our future life [in this world]”. This was a general meaning expressed by many. Education has a function for the individual both in his life today, his future life and his life after death, his next life. What role did the *madrasa* and the *maktab*, respectively, play from these perspectives? One father provided what seemed to be a clear-cut definition of the content and goals of the two school systems when he said: “In the *madrasa* there is spiritual knowledge for use in the next life. In the *maktab* the knowledge is material and aimed for this life”. However, many respondents offered a more complex picture. Generally, it was completely agreed that the major distinction between the two schools referred to the spiritual character of the *madrasa* and the material knowledge that was provided in the *maktab*. However, Islamic subjects and morals were also taught in *maktab*. Religious or spiritual matters were not only issues for the *madrasa*, but were included in the primary school too, which indeed was to everybody’s satisfaction. Many wished to increase these subjects in the *maktab* education. Moreover, the teaching of *adab* and *akhlaq* in the *madrasa* cannot be defined as solely spiritual or Islamic in nature (although the moral issues in *madrasa* education were usually believed as emanating from the Quran) as they often dealt with everyday matters and human relations.

Amina, a girl in grade 3, affirmed that both *maktab* and *madrasa* education was valuable for her life today, in the future and in the next:

All what we learn will be of benefit for this world and for the after-world. At home I teach my younger brothers and sisters. I make a school and I am the teacher... When I go to *maktab* I may become teacher or doctor in the future. So *maktab* is for this world....To work as teacher is good also for the next world...

To learn reading and writing is good for both worlds... The *madrasa* and the Quran is for the next world...In the *madrasa* we learn *adab* and *akhlaq*; it is good for this life.

Thus, to learn *adab* and *akhlaq* is valuable for social interactions in the present life. To behave honestly and to do valuable things in this life will be rewarded in the next. Becoming literate is useful since the gained knowledge can be used for serving other people, for example as teacher, and this work will be compensated also in the afterlife.

For Muslims there is a clear link between a human's accountability in this world and recompense in the next. Afghans strongly believe in the Judgement Day. Death is the end of the present life but is followed by resurrection. There will be a new beginning and a second life. On the Last Day (which, according to some scholars may have a duration of hundreds of years) the earth will sink into darkness and everyone's deeds in life will be weighted and judged by Allah. Some people will be allowed to enter the bridge to paradise while others will sink into the fires of hell. According to the Prophet Mohammad, those who will face problems on the Last Day are, for example, usurpers, trouble makers, sybarites, thieves, irresponsible parents and disobedient children – unless they repent, and unless Allah in his infinite compassion and mercy forgives them (Waines, 1995; Esposito, 1998; Hjärpe, 2004).

Such is the belief that underlies the statements people made with regards to the value of education for today, for tomorrow and for the day after tomorrow. The religious and moral education in the *madrasa* and the *maktab* was considered important because it provides a guide to daily life activities and facilitates human interactions. Moral education for children is important for their adult, future life as well, and will, provided the person has practiced the moral rules and ethical instructions, be vital in the next life too. Similarly, studying in the *maktab* was regarded as a useful activity in itself but primarily it was regarded as valuable for the future as it might lead to a future profession and a salaried job. If the person uses the *maktab* training to help others, s/he will be rewarded in the next world. Moreover, which was frequently repeated, *maktab* education is not only a means for individual success but is useful for developing the society as a whole. "All social development depends on education", declared a young male teacher in Charbagh. Further, if they have an education, "people become useful for the country [they could become] "professionals that can serve the country, and also protect the country" said another teacher.

"Islam is our religion"

"Thanks God that we are Muslims!" exclaimed one father spontaneously when we inquired about the differences between *maktab* and *madrasa*. He referred to the fact

that children, and adults, receive Islamic education because they are Muslims. He, like the majority of the respondents, believed that the most important things in life are learnt in the *madrasa*. He continued:

Mullahs ... teach us not to earn our money in a *haram* way, by theft, by corruption, by swindling. And many other things too, for example, to show respect to others, to love our country and our people, and how our predecessors have fought for our country...

A lecturer in the Faculty of *Shariat* at Kabul University expressed similar ideas when he explained the aim of knowledge “is to use it as a means to improve oneself, to purify one’s mind, soul and body and to serve Allah. And the best way to serve Allah is to serve human beings”.

A young father in Sujani explained: “I send my children to the *madrasa* since Islam is our religion”. Similar statements reappeared in many interviews. It conveys an awareness, which is common among Afghans, of the fact that everybody in the country shares the same faith. This faith is grounded in a firm conviction. There is a sense of a collective identity, a feeling of belonging and partaking: ‘We all have the same identity. We are Muslims. We have a religion in common. Islam is our religion’. Other respondents simply answered, “we are Muslims” when they explained the benefits of *madrasa* education. They seemed to think that this response was sufficient to such a question. Some parents added that they wanted their children to learn the same things they had learnt as children.

Afghans in general believe that it is an obligation to take responsibility for the religion. Many consider it a duty to protect Islam from attacks from outside. This feeling of responsibility seems to have increased, maybe as a consequence of the last decades of war. To defend Islam against the foreign aggression was one justification for the resistance against the Soviet invasion and is a position that is omnipresent also today. The feeling of responsibility for Islam does not exclude emotions such as enjoyment and gratefulness. A young, illiterate mother described Islam as “our foundation”, meaning that Islam represents the solid ground upon which life is constructed. It offers safety and stability. All the villagers of Sujani and Charbagh had suffered from the last decades of war and violence, and for them, Islam represented not only a foundation in life; it was an unchangeable asset in an uncertain world. It would last whatever happened, even after death. A father said:

The most important thing I have learnt is about Islam and praying. That learning will follow me to the end of my life. If I have gained a lot of money when I die, they will not follow me. Money remains here. But Islam follows me to the life thereafter.

It may not be remarkable that the respondents said that Islam is ‘our’ religion, considering that a religious belief usually is not privately “owned”, but shared with

others (although at times practised in private). However, respondents almost always referred to 'us', 'our' and 'we' instead of 'me', 'my' or 'I' regardless of the question posed. They seldom noticed that the questions were directed to them as individuals; even when the question requested a personal opinion, the respondent often answered by saying 'we' think.

This phenomenon is an expression of a collective identity. To use 'we' instead of 'I' reinforces what is said. It indicates that lots of people have similar ideas and think the same way and what I say becomes more valuable if I use 'we' as the pronoun. I am a representative of a collective. For example, a student who was asked about his view on disciplinary measures in school answered, "we don't learn when the teacher beats us" [our emphasis]. Another student responded to the same question with, "we learn better when we are scared". When a parent was asked about the advantages and disadvantages of *madrasa* and *maktab*, respectively, s/he may have felt a need to defend the *madrasa*. Arguing from a 'we' position made an opinion stronger.

Using 'we' may also indicate a wish from the respondents' side to keep a distance from the authors, the strange interviewers who represented 'The Other'. We were not part of their 'we'. They may have wanted to distinguish themselves by making a distinction between 'we' and 'you' (being the interviewers). When we, for example, asked parents why they sent their children to the *madrasa*, they may have felt a slight uncertainty as to why they were asked such a question. Maybe they wished to demonstrate that they were not alone, which was made clear by using 'we' in the response

On the other hand, one of the interviewers, Amir, is Afghan and Muslim and so not seen as an outsider from whom it was necessary to mark a distance. This was demonstrated by the respondents' use of 'we' on many occasions. They seemed to include him and it was obvious that they sometimes looked upon Amir as 'one of us'. For instance, it happened time after time that the respondents returned the question, and said: "Why do you ask me that question? You know this matter as well as I do".

Finally, the use of 'we' instead of 'I' may sometimes simply indicate that the respondents wanted to convey a piece of common sense knowledge, something everybody knows. It is knowledge "intersubjectively shared by a social group" as D'Andrade (1987) puts it. It defines a folk model (see *Chapter 7 The Concept of Folk Model or Folk Theory*).

Collectivity can be defined as the opposite to individuality. The individual in Afghan society is part of a social context and defines herself or himself in relation to a larger group. The nearest collective is the family and people in rural villages are often, if not mostly, relatives. The majority of the villagers in Sujani and Charbagh, particularly in the former case, was related to each other, although they at times were quite distant relatives. Using 'we' in conversations may imply belonging to a family. It shows that there are many relatives around with whom to share life. The individual is closely attached to family members (in a wide sense) and has certain

functions within that setting. S/he cannot claim to be a separate entity with their own will and preferences as their actions, behaviours and interactions are to a great extent determined by agreed upon norms. However, the individual can expect support and assistance from relatives in all phases of and situations in life and has mutual obligations towards them whenever need be.

## To know yourself

Many parents as well as students and teachers mentioned the necessity to learn to “know yourself”. By that they meant that children should learn about the rights and duties the individual has within the collective. First, children should learn about their immediate and extended family members, not only parents and siblings, but also grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, in-laws, second and third cousins and maybe even more distant relatives. It includes a large group and to know them implies not only knowing their names and places of living but more importantly, the role the child (and later as adult) has in relation to them. In other words, to learn the position the child has in the family is essential in learning to ‘know yourself’.

The oldest brother has a special position. He has particular responsibilities towards his younger siblings and is expected to care for them and to provide support, also in their adulthood, if necessary. In return, he enjoys respect and deference from his younger brothers and sisters, usually throughout life. As part of learning to ‘know yourself’, children are socialised into the accepted gender roles. Girls as well as boys learn and internalise the expected behaviour their gender prescribes. From an early age girls learn the duties that belong to housewives and mothers, while boys are taught to become fathers and the breadwinners of the family.

When talking about these issues, some parents added that a child should “know his path, his goal in life”. Children are taught that every human being has a certain destiny that only Allah knows. However, this does not imply a deterministic view of life. On the contrary, each individual has not only the responsibility but also the power to make the best out of life, to make an effort and work hard so that life becomes enjoyable and useful, and to set goals that benefit themselves as well as the collective in the widest possible sense.

Other parents mentioned a very common maxim in Afghanistan that goes, “someone who doesn’t know himself cannot know Allah”. To ‘know yourself’ implies understanding the role your creator, Allah, has given you. This includes inward reflection on actions and thoughts along with inquiry into one’s motives and scrutinising one’s inducements. To ‘know Allah’ is to understand what Allah’s wishes. His demands on human beings include human interactions that are respectful, supportive and encouraging. To put it simply: Human beings should live with good *akhlaq*.

## Both schools are needed

A great majority of parents considered it necessary for their children to attend both schools, the *maktab* as well as the *madrassa*. They were prepared to free their children from work, and “release the children to the teachers”, as one father in Sujani stated. A teacher made a similar interpretation of the role of parents regarding schooling:

The parents prepare their children for school. They allow them to go to school instead of staying at home and helping the family. One can say that parents thereby facilitate for children to learn... So the parents are important, they give the child the opportunity to learn.

Many parents confirmed this suggestion. A father in Charbagh said, for example: “That my children go to school is my responsibility. I am illiterate myself so I cannot help them. The only thing I can do is to pay attention to them, so that they go regularly to school”.

Virtually all parents both in Sujani and Charbagh said that their children went regularly to the *madrassa*, that is, to the mosque school. This was the case for boys and girls alike. It was not possible to find out with what regularity or for how long time the children attended the mosque school. A typical answer was “until they have learnt the basics about Islam” or, concerning girls’ attendance, “until they are big”. A very small number of children did not go to the mosque school at all. Usually, a too long distance was brought up as the reason, but a boy in grade 5 who lived in the outskirts of the village far from the big mosque had another explanation to his absence:

I go only to *maktab*. I would like to go to *madrassa* but the problem is that we have such an old mullah in our mosque so he cannot even see and what he tells I already know. He does not allow another mullah to teach us. He teaches the same things every day, year in and year out. So why should I go there?

Practically all families said that they sent their children to *maktab*. Obviously, taking the large absenteeism into account, regular attendance in the sense of daily or at least a next to daily presence was not considered necessary by all parents and students. The reasons for not going to school every day were many and varied. One day we happened to meet a boy in one of the lanes in the village at a time when he ought to be in school. We recognised him since we had interviewed him a few days earlier. He explained without hesitating that there was an engagement party in the house of a neighbour and as he must assist in serving the guests he could not go to school that day.

A vast majority of parents preferred that their children attended both types of schools. The main reason was that they wanted children to get both types of knowledge. When asked what children learnt in the schools, parents’ answers with regards to *maktab* learning were vaguer compared to what they knew about the contents of learning in the *madrassa*. This is probably explained by the fact that most parents had no or only



little experience of participation in *maktab*. The children's endeavours in *maktab* were unfamiliar for their illiterate or low-literate parents. They learn "things useful for daily activities" as one parent put it.

The parents chose to send their children to both schools because they thought the schools complement each other; in *maktab* children learn to read and write, whereas in *madrasa* they learn Islam. Parents who did not consider *madrasa* education as a sole option thought that the children learnt too little with regards to reading and writing. And those who did not consider *maktab* as the only option said it was because the teaching included far too little about Islam. A father in Sujani expressed a widely shared view: "I send my children to the mosque school to learn the basic things about Islam and to *maktab* so as to become literate". He further explained: "The aim is to gain knowledge. In the *madrasa* the knowledge is for personal, spiritual development and in the *maktab* they learn for a material future life". Many parents referred to the obligation of education that is inherent in Islam, and quoted a famous *hadith*, which states that "to seek knowledge is compulsory".<sup>184</sup> They regarded this principle to be applicable for both types of schools.

Attending both schools was considered by some parents as a way to get more instruction time and so children would learn more. Yet another reason for allowing children to attend both *maktab* and *madrasa* was to keep them busy. One father said: "It is good to have them in both schools. If not, they are just out and play". One of the mothers saw it like this: "My children are too small for work at home so they have free time and can go to school". In one family they had more or less been forced to send their children to the *maktab*. The parents had at first not seen any use for any other type of education than what was provided by the *madrasa*. But, as the father explained, "the headmaster just came here and registered them, he said they must come... If my daughter had been smaller I would have accepted to send her too".<sup>185</sup>

Parents did not in any of the villages divide their own children between the two schools. In a study of two Gambian villages, parents sent some of their children to Islamic education and some others to the Western type of school in order to maximise the outcomes (Okuma-Nyström, 2003). Similar strategies were common in a similar study in Senegal (Daun, 1992). Such parental choices have not been found in the present study.

<sup>184</sup> *Mishkat-al- Masabih- Hadith* Collection, Vol 1, Book II.

<sup>185</sup> Older people in both villages told about the times – in the 1960s and 1970s – when sometimes the police came and brought the children to school. School was compulsory and parents did not have the right to keep the children (= the boys) at home.



## To become something

A farmer who sows something expects something in return. So do I. If I spend money on [my children's] education I expect them to find some official job as engineers, doctors, teachers or something. They must become something. If you benefit from people you should also pay back. (A Sujani father).

## What do you want to be when you grow up?

When we asked the children what they wished to do as grown-ups, all of them, boys as well as girls, anticipated a future with a professional, salaried job. They knew that the jobs they aspired to required many years of university training<sup>186</sup>. To become a doctor, a teacher or an engineer were by far the most popular options and a few children mentioned 'office worker' as a possible occupation. One boy wanted to become a car mechanic and another wished to be an Islamic scholar. Historically, medicine, engineering, education (teacher training) and law have been the only disciplines to study at Afghan universities<sup>187</sup>, and the only alternatives children in Sujani and Charbagh had heard about. They took for granted that their parents would support them in these endeavours. Several students mentioned the reason for their choice of profession was so they would be able to assist their parents. One of them phrased it like this:

I want to serve and help my parents. I want to continue to study. When they are old I will help them as they help us when we are children. When they become old and need something we should prepare that for them. I should earn money for them. I want to study so that in the future I can become something.

These primary school children, some of them as young as nine to ten years, saw their present school activities as something they primarily use in the distant future. Knowing how to read and write was of limited use to them as children. When asked how they used their literacy skills, they could give but a few examples. They mentioned two things: To write and read letters, and to write shopping lists. However, these were activities the village children did quite rarely. The textbooks used in *maktab* and *madrasa* were the only books available. None of the schools were equipped with libraries. These school children had very seldom, if ever, been in touch with newspapers and magazines. As such, participation in school had no specific value today. This fact, however, did not seem to dishearten the children. They did not seem to have any doubt about their bright future. "I like school" explained one boy "because school can turn me into something else".

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<sup>186</sup> In 2006, university students were estimated to less than one per cent of all students in the country (Ministry of Education, 2006).

<sup>187</sup> A few more disciplines have been added lately.

“But suppose you will remain here, marry with someone in the village and become a housewife or a farmer like your mother or father?” we asked. “Still, education is useful”, answered most of the students but only a few could explain why. Momen, a boy in grade six, said: “Even if I have to become farmer my education would remain with me”. He continued:

Maybe my knowledge is not of much use for the farming but maybe one day I will have use for it. For example, someone else might need my help and ask me how much he needs to buy and how much he has to pay for two *sers* [14 kg; our remark]. of wheat, for instance.

Even if education did not lead to a profession immediately the students were hopeful and “maybe I will get a job one day” was a typical response, in particular from the boys. They seemed unable to imagine any other future but a continuation to secondary school and then university. One boy, though, answered bluntly: “If I remain here like my parents my education would be wasted”. Fatima, one of the girls with clear plans for her future agreed: “We should use our knowledge *outside*. I don’t want to go to school in order to sit at home”. It is worth noting that in 2006, only 13 per cent of primary school students continued to secondary education and less than 12 per cent of secondary graduates entered university (Ministry of Education, 2006).

## Parents’ aspirations

When children were asked how they perceived their own parents’ motives for sending them to *maktab*, the responses were less precise. “They want us to become something” was a common answer. “My father wants me to get somewhere”, said one girl. Any of the professions listed above were seldom mentioned as reason. Some children mentioned that their parents wanted children to learn about Islam, and Jahid, 16 years old, thought: “Our parents send us to *maktab* to learn, because to get knowledge is like worshipping Allah. I will have use for that in my future life”. Children were also aware that their parents wanted them to have a better life than they had. One boy understood his parents’ motives as, “they say that they are illiterate and have had a hard life so they want us to go to *maktab* so we get a brighter future”. Another boy referred to his illiterate parents too: “They always say that they could not go to school and now they hope that we will become something”. Some students had parents who had experience of *maktab* education and these children thought that this fact was the motive: “My father is educated himself and he wants us to become like him”, declared one of the girls.

The parents’ expectations coincided a great deal with the children’s. They focussed on the same future jobs as the children had mentioned. They referred not only to the improved life standards such jobs would bring, but also to the status that

followed with such positions. “Look at me, I am nothing, I have never studied!” exclaimed one mother. Another mother said: “We are nothing now, but we want our children to be educated ... to work in offices and not have such hard work as we have in the fields – that is why we send them to *maktab*”. Intellectual work was seen as easy work; indeed, almost as no work at all when compared with the hard physical work the villagers were used to.<sup>188</sup>

Parents who had some background in education, be it only for a few years, praised this experience and wished their children to have the same. One father said, for example: “I was in school and now I am able to keep my shop and to deal with money. I can write things, I make notes, for example, so I don’t forget things”.

To send children to school is an investment for future and parents expected something in return. Sons will take care of their parents when they get old, and a son with an education and a salaried job is thought to have better possibilities to provide a good life for his parents in their old days. It may be profitable for parents to also send girls to school even if the daughters marry and move away to other families. A father argued: “If you want to benefit you have to pay also. Even for the girls it is worthwhile although they will go to the houses of others. I will benefit from them also because it is like blessing (*khair*) for me”. He indicated that parents might benefit not only materially from their children’s education in the future, but indirectly, children’s education would also have significance for parents’ afterlife. Parents who sacrifice themselves for their children and facilitate their education instead of requiring their labour have acted in a way that is assumed to please Allah. A job such as a teacher or doctor implies work that is of use for other human beings and are therefore believed to be blessed by Allah. Parents, whose children are working in such humanitarian professions, are also thought to be blessed in the current life: “I expect my sons to become teachers so other people make *doa* [call for Allah’s blessings] on them and on me. So I will also benefit spiritually by educating my children”, explained one father.

### Not only salaried jobs...

Great hopes were connected to education. Education was expected to bring big changes into peoples’ lives. Generally, the goal was a salaried job, taken to mean government employment, regardless of profession. Being a doctor, a teacher, an engineer or the more vague ‘office worker’ were all imagined as government positions. However, it seemed that the salary was less important than the perceived easy nature of “white collar jobs”. Such jobs were also attractive due to the supposed status and prestige they held. Some respondents emphasised the power attached to government positions. One father

<sup>188</sup> A well known saying in Afghanistan tells that loading and unloading the donkey is an art – and not that easy as studying, which requires only browsing of pages.

wanted his “children to become high ranking people ...”. Another father wanted his “sons to get jobs in the government, to get a *mansab* [government position with certain authority]”. Traditionally, representatives of government authorities acted and behaved as if they had great power and influence (whether that was the case or not), particularly when they met with poor, illiterate and rural people. The villagers had experienced government officials such as army officers, policemen, district and provincial officers (not least the telephone operator!), doctors, teachers and headmasters. All of these had apparent power. However, this aspect of power and authority was raised by only some of the fathers. Neither students nor mothers included these aspects in their motives for desiring the government jobs. A government job represented a transformation, a chance for social mobility, which would be possible through education. A government position might imply moving away from the village to a city, at least to the district capital and it would mean a more prominent occupation instead of tedious farming work. Practically all respondents saw education as a means to achieve a more “prosperous life” which would entail more comfort and more respect. A mother explained: “We do not only want to get money from our children’s education but also ... that they become respected members of society”.

Parents said that they wanted their children, including to a large extent their daughters, to continue and study in the university. Whatever reasons they had – power, influence, status, respect, money and/or comfort – the respondents emphasised that not only would the individual benefit from the future jobs, but also their whole immediate and extended family. The individual’s contributions, financial as well as others, are expected to be valuable for a wider circle – the collective.

As important as the assistance and support to the extended family, is the contribution to the entire community. This is sometimes understood to mean the limited context of the current village and sometimes the entire nation of Afghanistan. That the children should “serve our people and our country” was a general meaning expressed by many parents. They wished that the children’s education would lead to useful jobs so that other people would get advantage of and benefit from the knowledge and professional activities their children as adults would have. ‘Usefulness’ had two dimensions. One was connected to obligations and duties, and the other to moral and inner incitements. Generally, it was considered that a community member who had been granted education was obliged to use his knowledge for the promotion and development of the whole community. As a moral being, a person with education should act ethically and, for example, help other people when they were in need. In particular, the teacher profession was regarded as a moral undertaking. Children also communicated such views. They frequently expressed their calling to help develop the country. Zabih, a boy in grade six considered that “we study for our future, to improve our future, so we can teach others and help others. To become a teacher, for example, is to be a good example for others”.

While the students generally were very optimistic regarding their future, some of

the parents were more careful in their predictions. Occasionally, their aspirations were not directed towards a well-off future but were more moderate: “I want my children to have *tarbiya* ... and that they have knowledge”, said one father. An illiterate mother had the same opinion: “Education is good in itself, they become good people if they have education”. Another father commented on the usefulness of sending girls to school: “For my daughters I expect them to become good mothers. They should have basic Islamic knowledge so that they can raise themselves and their children according to Islam. So they can make good people of their children.” He commented that it has become difficult to find marriage partners for daughters unless they have some education.

In general, life itself and the experience a long life brings were considered valuable sources of knowledge (and wisdom). This view is reflected in the respect that old people enjoy and the special institution of elders, the *shura*. Still, however, the common belief was that the outcome of education is a better human being. Studying results in a person, man or woman, with high moral standards, who is a cultured and refined human being. “Becoming literate is very good” was a very frequent remark. It was believed that through education a person becomes knowledgeable and further: “If people get knowledge they become human (*insan*). They get wiser. There will be light in front of them”. An educated person deserves and also receives respect; in fact, to be educated is almost identical to being respected. When the village needed someone to represent the inhabitants, only a person who is respected by everyone is considered. That person has preferably participated in education and depending on the context, a *madrasa* or *maktab* education is required. If, for example, the villagers need to talk to officials at government authorities, the chance for being understood and successful is greater if the spokesperson has had some years of *maktab* schooling since he may use language in the same way as the official. If advice is needed in human or spiritual matters or help is needed to settle disputes, a man with *madrasa* education might be a better option. Similarly, women with formal education enjoy more respect than illiterate females. They are greeted by the respectful “*sahib*”, a title that in Afghanistan is used only for people with some authority, male or female. A mullah explained the difference between people with and without education like this: “A person with education acts with awareness, while someone with no education is more spontaneous. For example, when praying the first one knows what he is doing while the second just acts out a behaviour”.

Respondents indicated that with education a sense of independence was within reach. Although life up until now had been quite easy without literacy skills, people in the villages were aware that the need for these abilities was on the increase. To be educated would make it possible “to solve my own problems”, one father said and continued, “if I were able to read and write I would not have to ask others for help”. Several people expressed similar sentiments to explain why education was held in such esteem. Such utterances contradicted what they said in other contexts when they

were stressing the mutual and unproblematic dependency within their collective. These inner conflicts reflect the crossroad or the point of intersection at which people have increasingly found themselves. To be illiterate is to be dependent in the current society and there is a new phenomenon arising that labels such dependence as being close to shame. Any time a document or a letter should be read, the illiterate person has to seek assistance. Any time a paper has to be written someone else must be contacted. Having to put a thumbprint instead of a signature is, although still shared by many, a little disgraceful and is an object for mockery: "He is a thumbing one!"

## If only one choice?

As mentioned, practically all respondents stressed the importance for children to attend both schools. We wanted to know which school they would choose if they had to choose only one. Some respondents first refused to make a choice and said it was impossible to select only one school, but after some consideration they nevertheless provided an answer. Around 30 per cent of all respondents preferred the *madrassa* over the *maktab* while the rest, some 70 per cent, favoured the *maktab*. There was a slight difference as regards the children's preferences in that not all but a majority of the boys and all the girls favoured the *maktab*. Both boys and girls put the literacy skills and the possible future jobs on the advantageous side of *maktab*. The chance to get a future job was the reason also for one of the boys who selected the *madrassa* because he wished to become a mullah or a teacher of Islamic subjects. The gender difference is replicated when the responses of the fathers and mothers are compared. Twice as many mothers as fathers preferred the *maktab*. Their arguments also referred to the possibilities of getting a job after studies in the *maktab*. One father provided a typical answer:

Both [schools] are good but *maktab* is better. I regret so much that I have not been to school...In *madrassa* they can become at the most a mullah but in *maktab* they become something else, for example, teacher, engineer or something. Those who have been to *maktab* have an advantage.

Some mothers mentioned that *maktab* is the only possible school for girls who are "big" (provided they are taught by female teachers). This reason was brought up also by some fathers who preferred the *maktab*: "I would chose *maktab* because when girls are small they can go to the mosque but not when they are big. But they can go to *maktab* for many years", claimed one father. Many parents, both fathers and mothers, held the view that *maktab* was advantageous because it taught Islam to the students or rather, that *maktab* also taught Islam. *Maktab* offered both types of subjects, religious as well as non-religious, something the *madrassa* unfortunately lacked. However,

many thought that the time assigned for religious teaching in *maktab* was far too little. For those who selected *madrassa* as the best option, religious education was the main reason. One mother, who was a teacher in the girl school argued: “I would choose *madrassa* because there we learn the Quran and about Islam. There is too little Islam in *maktab*”. Others who preferred the *madrassa* claimed that Islamic knowledge is more important than secular knowledge, for boys and girls alike.

## No school

The few families who did not send their children to school usually referred to their poverty and the family’s need for child labour. A fairly young father with many children argued:

I am poor and none of my children has been to school. I would send them if someone could replace the income they bring home. I would send them to *maktab* then. I don’t know what the benefits of education are but I know it is good. To be able to write is good.

Another father explained:

I am too poor and I cannot afford education for my children. If I could I would send them to the *madrassa* but my children need to work together with me. Only one son goes to school. My daughters go to the mosque school in the morning sometimes but they never go to *maktab*.

Some parents expressed a feeling of insufficiency due to their illiteracy and felt they were unable to support their children’s learning. *Maktab* was an alien place for many parents as they had never attended and had only vague perceptions of what went on there. The *madrassa* environment, on the other hand, was well known to everyone. All parents had as children experienced the mosque school. A Charbagh father of six children, a day worker, explained:

My sons don’t go to school because my wife and I are working and we cannot help them, we cannot encourage them. My children go to the mosque to learn how to pray but they do not go to *maktab*. As father and as Muslim I am obliged to send my children to school but we are poor and our children have to take care of the animals. So we can only send them to the mosque.

He belonged to the ethnic minority of Kohistanis and complained about discrimination in school, which might have influenced his decision or been used to justify his decision. To our understanding, which was also confirmed by members of the village shuras, these families were not poorer than many others, with one exception (the father was



sick and a hashish abuser). Probably more factors than poverty had influenced their decisions.

Some parents were strongly opposed to what children learned in the primary school – or did not learn. The relevance of education in *maktab* was questioned and some people considered that the learning lacked accordance with what people needed and expected. A father from Sujani wondered:

Who should become farmers if all children go to school and learn writing? Schools must become better; there should be more Islam on the timetable. The government should listen to us and make the schools such as we want to have them.

Another father who emphasised his strong belief in education and described participation as an obligation, claimed that he had decided to withdraw his son after five years in *maktab* because the teachers had not taught well:

I would like to dismiss all the teachers in school, because after five years my child had not learnt much – he cannot even write his name properly. Previously people with only six-seven years of education became officers or so but now the situation is not good.

A few parents reacted to what they saw as lack of organisation and discipline. They saw “students come and go as they like”. They had noticed that teachers were not on time and that the school year did not begin and end on fixed dates. Students did not line up before entering the classroom and rushed around and shouted. Further, the stick was not used as frequently as before. The previously quoted father continued:

When we were in school, schools were places for moral training, places for *tarbiya*. The rules were stricter and schools were better organised. We were not absent for a single day, while now it is up to the students themselves. They go to school if they wish and if they don’t want to go they just stay at home. School has become a place for *haramzadagi* [approximately ‘rogues’] ... There should be more Islamic subjects in school. Neither in the mosque school nor in *maktab* children learn Islam. There is no shame (*haya*) in schools. That’s why I don’t want to send my children to school, not even my boys!

It is uncertain whether this father was aware of the curricular changes at the time that had reduced teaching of Islam in *maktab*. The teachers in Sujani had been careful not to spread this fact to the parents. The reduction of Islamic subjects in the timetable had caused irritation among many parents. Additionally, the *maktab* teachers often complained about the difficulty to squeeze in what they regarded as compulsory Islamic knowledge in a few hours per week.



## Education outside the schools

Most parents, including the mothers had been students in mosques schools when they were children and so knew what was taught in the *madrasa*. The children talked with their parents about what they had learned in the mosque school and parents would easily recognise it. This was not always the case regarding the *maktab* since only few parents had experience of being a student in a primary school. The craving to learn how to read and write was a common theme in the respondents' speech and a sense of inferiority was sometimes displayed among those who felt they were "nothing" since they had never been a student. A feeling of dependency was, as mentioned, at times (reluctantly) communicated by illiterate parents. On the other hand, many others articulated confidence and self-assurance, which seemed to be rooted in their faith and knowledge about Islam. Learning about Islam is, to a certain extent, at least for men, an issue of lifelong learning. The continuous studies, even by illiterates, may have contributed to the feeling of self-confidence. Men go to the mosque regularly for pray, to listen to the imam and other mullahs, and discuss and debate with other men. Some also, sit and read the Quran, and some continue their Islamic studies with some systematisation throughout life.

As a parent, a father or mother has not only the duty to raise their children but also to teach them Islam. One father informed:

We parents are responsible for our children's education and even more responsible for our girls' education. We should have enough of Islamic education so that we can teach them, first at home and then send them to mosque or to *maktab* or wherever they can learn about Islam... So I do myself. I tell my children what is right according to Islam and how should they behave.

Moreover, parents regarded their own responsibilities for transmitting values related to *adab* and *akhlaq* to be no less than the teachers' duties to provide values education in the *madrasa* and the *maktab*. They were confident in their abilities to transmit ethical matters to children. "To teach good morals is the father's and mother's duty. If they don't teach the children, they will be running here and there and make trouble for others. After us, the teacher is responsible. It is on his shoulder up to 12 o'clock", declared a father. Values they wished to transfer included, for example, "to be hardworking and honest", and "respect, courage and hospitality". One father explained he taught his children the same as he had learnt from his father, which included to "do my own work and provide *halal* food to my family". Several parents said that children should learn to "help others".

Additionally, parents thought they were responsible for transmitting household and farming skills to their daughters and sons. Mothers taught their daughters how to wash clothes, clean the house, wash dishes, look after children, to cook, to embroider and how to use the sewing machine. Fathers taught their sons "how to care for a

family”, and of course, vocational skills, such as farming, carpentry, tailoring or something else.

As mentioned previously, life experience is a valued asset in Afghanistan, and old people are as a rule held in high esteem due to their wisdom. “In Afghanistan there are no illiterate people; all old people are knowledgeable” was the opinion of a father. Elders were considered to be very learned persons. They “should tell about mistakes they have made... their successes and failures... and transfer their experiences [about] what to do, what is proper behaviour” was what another father thought. Parents were sometimes proud of and valued their experiences. Many seemed confident, for example, one father said, “I may be illiterate and may not be able to answer some of your questions, but otherwise, in issues related to real life I can argue with anyone, and I can stand up against many educated people”. Elders traditionally made up the *shuras* but ‘elders’ nowadays are not necessarily old people. Interestingly, in both Sujani and Charbagh, but more obvious in Charbagh, aside from age, elders often had another quality, they had *maktab* education.

As is evident from this short account, education does not only take place in *maktab* and *madrassa*. To a large extent education also occurs in children’s homes. Not only are mullahs with Islamic education and teachers with a *maktab* education (and sometimes professional training) responsible for children’s learning. Their illiterate and low-literate parents are important instructors as well.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

According to the respondents, *adab* and *akhlaq* (good behaviour and obligations towards others and Allah) are the most important things children should learn in school, first of all in the mosque school but also in the primary school. Islamic education is to a great deal identical to moral or values education and in general, education was believed to bring about people with good morals and conduct.

It was believed that things learned in *madrassa* as well as in *maktab* are (or should be) useful for the present, the future and the afterlife. Respondents strongly emphasised that the goal with education is to create people who act morally and whose education (and subsequent professions) is beneficial for family members as well as for the development of the country. A collective identity was evident in most responses.

Contrary to studies in other countries, parents preferred their children to attend both types of schools simultaneously. They wanted them to become literate on the one hand, and to learn about Islam, on the other. Generally, there was a large dissatisfaction with the little amount of time spent on Islam in *maktab*. In general, parents placed a large portion of responsibility on their own shoulders for educating their children and were very confident in their abilities to raise and educate their children.

Both children and parents had great expectations of *maktab* education as a means

to get salaried jobs but only government jobs could be imagined. A handful of families did not send their children to school and referred to their need of children's labour. However, since such a need was prevalent among most families, there were likely other reasons behind the decision. These reasons were not explored further since this group was only small in number.

Respondents displayed great trust in education. They relied enormously on education as a means to create honest, dignified and peaceful people with competencies for developing the country and increasing standards of living. They strongly emphasised the role of Islam in education even when expressing their preference for *maktab* education (shown when they were compelled to choose). Of note, girls and mothers particularly favoured *maktab*, which may reflect the fact that it is most often the only possibility of education for girls above a certain age.

There are signs however, that the collective identity and spirit is under pressure. When *maktab* education is made available for everyone, those who do not participate or those who are too old to participate feel sidestepped and ashamed. The elders' *shura* includes many young men who are members because of their *maktab* education. Still, being illiterate is the most common condition in both villages.

## Chapter Fourteen

# Girls' Education: Separation and Obligation

Girls' education is and has always been a sensitive issue in Afghanistan, that is, it has been an issue of concern as regards Western type of education. That teaching and learning in Islamic institutions always has been intended exclusively for boys and men has hardly been questioned. Since the 1920s, as was discussed in *Chapter 9 Education in Afghanistan*, Western type of education for girls has resulted in hot debates, quite a few uprisings and has even been used as one of the justifications for invading the country<sup>189</sup>. That Afghan women throughout history up until today have been blocked from studying Islam (at least as students of Islamic institutions) has not caused the same frustration. Scarcely any attention has been paid to this exclusion.

Why has the issue of girls' participation in *maktab* education instigated so much resistance in Afghanistan? And why is the issue still so burning? These questions include so many dimensions that they require a study in their own right and therefore only some aspects can be discussed in the present study. It should be kept in mind, however, that women and girls have been hindered from participation in social affairs, including participation in education, all over the world, in Western as well as in Third World countries<sup>190</sup>. In most countries in the South, girls still constitute less than half of all the students in schools. In the least developed countries girls are often less than one third<sup>191</sup>.

In addition to the general oppression of girls and women that exists in Afghanistan<sup>192</sup> as well as worldwide in various forms, there are many factors behind the reluctance to educate girls. These include, for example, strictly segregated gender roles, separate spheres of life and different behaviours expected from males and females. The patterns of gender relations in Afghanistan are complex. The man is the head of the family and the decision power rests with him. However, the relation between a man and a woman is not only an expression of oppression - it also entails respect. Women should be kept in their place – as an Afghan man might put it – but women should also

<sup>189</sup> President Bush claimed that the American invasion in 2001 was indispensable for liberating Afghan women from the *Taliban* ban on girls' education.

<sup>190</sup> Swedish women, for example, were not allowed to study at universities until 1870 – and then only at the medical faculty (Nationalencyclopedia, 1989).

<sup>191</sup> There is still a big gap between boys' and girls' net enrolment rate in many countries. In Pakistan, for example, NER is 78 per cent for boys and 50 per cent for girls, in Mauritania 87 and 68 per cent respectively and in Chad 75 and 51 per cent respectively (UNICEF, 2006b).

<sup>192</sup> Women's oppression is not the topic of this study, but the following quotation is worth reading: "The stereotyped image of the Afghan woman, has, I believe, been created by male anthropologists who describe her as a possession, a slave toiling all day long and in addition, has to serve as a breeding animal...I saw strength and confidence characterising the village women..." (Dupree, 1996, p. 26).

be respected and treated in a dignified and deferential manner. To speak badly about women, to use sexual words, to insult women or to beat women is considered almost unforgivable abuse. The man has a role to play beyond the home while the woman's sphere is fully restricted to the house and the family. The subjugation of women also comes to a certain degree, from the need for protection. Afghanistan has always been characterised by weak state institutions (social welfare institutions in a Western sense have never existed, for example) and during long periods the country has also lacked basic rules of law and order. In such a situation the extended family with its fixed roles and rules represents shelter and safety. The man, the father, the husband, or the brother, is (or should be) a guardian and protector.

The relations and the required behaviours also involve strong emotions related to shame and honour. It is a shame if a man treats women incorrectly, and a woman who behaves improperly (particularly if seen by others) is shameful. The honour of a man who cannot live up to his role as family provider and protector is severely damaged, and a woman who is careless in her housekeeping or upbringing of children also gets her honour hurt.

To question the fixed, centuries-old gender roles is often understood, by men as well as women, as an attack on Afghanistan's fundamental value system; indeed, as an attack on Islam itself. However, in our interviews with people in Sujani and Charbagh we seldom faced a problem when we brought up sensitive issues related to gender. The villagers generally did not seem to perceive our questions as assaulting or insulting, answering promptly without hesitation. The present state of affairs as regards gender roles and rules for conduct was so self evident and manifest, seen as next to unchangeable, almost like a law of nature. When asked how they looked upon girls' participation in education or other questions relating to gender relations and codes of conduct, they often just referred to *how things were*. Girls should not have more than a few years of Islamic education because they did not get more than a few years. They did not get more because they could not because to be taught by a man would be dishonourable. Women should work inside houses because they did so and to do otherwise would harm their reputation and honour. These attitudes are typical examples of what Horton (1993) has called the "closed predicament". Established norms are accepted as unchangeable, as 'sacred' and people are not aware of alternatives.

This chapter reports ideas concerning girls' participation in education as expressed by parents, students, teachers, mullahs and other respondents. Their thoughts can roughly be sorted into three categories; 1) girls and boys have the same right to and the same need for education, 2) girls should have the same education as boys provided certain conditions are met, and 3) girls do not need education as much as boys.

Why did they think the way they did? How did they argue for their standpoints? Who thought what? To what extent has the fact that the history of girls' education is quite different in the two villages influenced the villagers' views? This chapter attempts to answer these questions.

## “Boys and girls have the same right to education”

A clear majority of the respondents agreed in principal with the Afghan constitution of 2004<sup>193</sup>, which stipulates that “[e]ducation is the right of *all* citizens of Afghanistan [our emphasis] (Art. 43, Ch. 2, Art. 22) and that the state should “devise and implement effective programs ... for promoting education for women (Art. 44, Ch. 2, Art. 23). Some respondents referred to the government when the issue of girls' education was discussed: “It is up to the government to decide whether [boys and girls] should have the same level of education or not”. Others meant it was the duty of the authorities to adjust the conditions if girls should have the same opportunities as boys. One of the imams argued, “the government is responsible to arrange the conditions so that girls can get the same Islamic education as boys get”. Mostly, the respondents held very unambiguous and explicit ideas on girls' participation in education. When the questions dealt with their own daughters their responses sometimes contradicted their in principal expressed agreement with the constitution.

### Because men and women, boys and girls, are equal

“Boys and girls have the same right to education”, declared a father in Charbagh. He had studied a couple of years in primary school and had spent more than four years in a *madrassa* in a refugee camp in Pakistan. He was now 35 years old and had five children, four boys and one daughter. The girl was still too young to attend *maktab* but went to the mosque in the mornings. A great number of respondents responded similarly; “both boys and girls should have the same education”. They should have the same type of education, both *maktab* and *madrassa*. Girls and boys alike should study “as long as they can”, that is, as long as they passed the annual examinations and were upgraded. Or “as long as they learn something useful” as some parents put it. Sometimes the respondents said that children should go to school “until they have gained enough”. One father said: “Both [boys and girls] should go to *maktab* until they get necessary knowledge”. When asked what they meant by ‘necessary’ or ‘useful’ knowledge, only vague answers were provided, which may reflect the quite hazy perceptions parents had of what children learnt and did in *maktab*.

Generally, the students were more in favour of education on equal terms than their parents were. While the adults usually added certain conditions on the ‘right to education’ for girls, the students did not give any requisites. With the exception of three boys in Charbagh, all the interviewed students in both villages were of the opinion that boys and girls have the same right to education and that they also need the same education. “Both should have the same. We are the same people” was the opinion of Zalmai,

<sup>193</sup> The constitution of 1964 also stipulated compulsory education for all

a 17-year-old boy in grade six in Sujani. His schoolmate, 13 years of age, declared:

Education should be the same for boys and girls but some people don't send their girls to school. They should. It is good for both to study. It is a shame if a man has lower education than his wife or if it is the opposite – they should be equal.

Rahila, a girl, 13 years old in grade three, first said, “girls should have more education than boys” but then quickly changed her mind, saying “no, both should get the same”.

In a meeting with the imam and other mullahs in Sujani we asked whether boys and girls should have the same education and they exclaimed in unison: “*Bale, bale, bale!*” (Yes, yes, yes!)<sup>194</sup>. However, as to the content of education for both boys and girls they were not in agreement. The imam, in contrast to the others, thought that all children, boys as well as girls, needed only 20 per cent *maktab* and 80 per cent *madrassa* education.

A group of out-of-school girls, aged 15 to 17 years old, were interviewed in Sujani. They had never attended *maktab*, which they all regretted very much and found “unfair”. They stated that boys and girls have the same right to education and asserted that they would definitely send their own daughters to school when the time came.

## Because education is *farz* for both sexes according to Islam

While some of the answers above might be associated with the modern principle of children's equal rights to education, a more common argument referred to the centuries-old Islamic principle of *farz* (obligation) in education. This principle also entails gender equality, since it prescribes acquiring knowledge as a duty for women and men alike. “Knowledge is *farz* so therefore both boys and girls should get education” was a statement frequently made by many respondents, men and women, boys and girls. A teacher in Charbagh clarified that:

According to one *hadith*, knowledge is *farz* for both males and females. In previous times this was interpreted so that only some Islamic education was obligatory for women but not learning how to read and write. But the needs of our present society indicate that both men and women should get the same knowledge. [our remark]: He referred to this *hadith*: “The search for knowledge is an obligation laid on every Muslim” (Mishkat-al- Masabih, Vol 1, Book II)

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<sup>194</sup> Intentionally, we mixed the questions about girls' education. Questions ranged from such straightforward ones as this to more precise questions about level, length, content etc. of education. In between, we also discussed other topics. Through this measure we were able to find inconsistencies as well as contradictions.

He was a fairly young teacher, graduated from a secondary school in Peshawar, Pakistan, and had most of his teaching experience from a refugee camp school. None of his four daughters were in *maktab* for the reason that “two are too small and two are too big”. The older ones attended the so called “accelerated learning classes”, though.

One respondent was a father in Charbagh with almost completed secondary education (grade 11), worked as a day worker and described himself as very poor, “but with a happy marriage”. He was strongly convinced that “there is no difference between boys and girls, both should have the same education. Men and women have the same duties towards Allah and the same things are required by both of us”.

The strong principle that education is compulsory for both boys and girls collided with the equally strong principle of segregated education, a collision that for some people presented a real dilemma, as we will see later on. For others there was no doubt which principle triumphed over the other, as one father said:

It is said by our Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) that knowledge is *farz* for both men and women. Islamic knowledge is *farz* and if *maktab* is according to Islam, girls and boys should have the same education but if something is wrong there, it is not *farz* [our emphasis].

For him, nothing was wrong in the Charbagh school so all his daughters of school age attended the girl *maktab*.

That education in general and in principle is a right and/or an obligation for both boys and girls was thus the general consensus. Also, it was commonly agreed that education for girls must be arranged “according to Islam” and what that included will be discussed below. First though, some reflections on what kind of education girls and boys *need*, since the right or the obligation to education may not be understood as equivalent to the need of education.

## Do boys and girls need the same education?

“We desperately need female teachers!”

So exclaimed a 30 years old female teacher in Sujani, and she added that, “girls *must* continue their education”. (As mentioned, at the time of the interview, it was uncertain whether the girls in grade three would be able to continue to grade four given that there was only one female teacher available in the village).

The need for female teachers and doctors was a frequent justification made by the proponents of girls' education. “Girls should study to become doctors and teachers”



was a common opinion. “Nowadays female doctors are needed,” said Gulab, a boy in the same school. With the new peace, albeit fragile, health clinics and hospitals were functioning again, and the strong conviction that women must be treated by women had resulted in the conclusion that girls must study. Female doctors must have medical training, so logically, girls need education. With the almost equally strong conviction that only women can teach girls, it was also obvious that females needed training to become teachers.

Besides housework there are few professions such as medical doctors and teachers, considered appropriate for women. Many parents hoped for white-collar jobs in offices for their sons but for the daughters office work was given as an alternative only exceptionally, and only if “appropriate places [are arranged] for them in government offices, such as separate rooms and so”. The purpose of *maktab* education was for many respondents the prospects of a salaried job (see *Chapter 13 What is the Meaning?*). Those who advocated for girls’ education due to the need of female teachers and doctors never mentioned that these occupations came with salaries. A woman’s work is seen as charity, not as a paid profession. Her job as teacher and doctor is accepted since it does not intrude upon the man’s domain as the family provider, as the breadwinner. Therefore, a woman cannot work as, for example, a merchant or vendor in the bazaar; “no, no, no that is a shame,” a boy in Charbagh emphatically stated. Neither as a farmer for a man who brings his wife to work in the field harms his own honour, unless he has strong reasons for doing so. “It is a shame if the woman has to work outside, but I am sick so my wife helps me with the farming”, an aged father said apologetically.

The firm gender roles, which give the family provider role to the man and the household work to the woman, imply that a man who needs or requests his wife to share the burden of family provision is not a real man. Since he cannot support his family himself, he brings disgrace not only upon himself but also upon his wife and children. This labour division has not always been so strict but with a shrinking need for labour in agriculture activities due to smaller and smaller plots and bigger and bigger families, the need for women’s labour in the fields has decreased. The forced migration that has taken place during the last decades means that the neighbours may not be, as before, as well-known, and therefore it has become even more important to uphold women’s reputations. The experience of life in the refugee camps with very limited physical space for women has likely influenced the present situation too. A day worker in Charbagh, a recently settled *kuchi* (nomad) illustrated this development:

Traditionally, there were many things women did outside. They used to work together with men, for example in sowing and harvesting, watering the fields, looking after goats and sheep and so. This was nothing special. Now life is getting so complicated and such traditions are seen as shame. Then, our lives were much wider (*frakh*) than it is at present.

He meant that previously the network of relatives, close as well as distant, of friends and neighbours, was larger and of a more positive character.<sup>195</sup>

Women's work outside the home was hard to accept for many of the men interviewed, even when the options were restricted and the conditions appropriate. A father in Sujani asked rhetorically: "Who should look after their children if they work outside? Everyone has five-six small children!" He had another argument too, at least as regards uneducated women working outside home, in which "educated women can control themselves when they are outside and work but illiterate women don't know where to go or how to go...they don't know how to behave, they misbehave, they are ignorant".

Women with (*maktab*) education were not exclusively confined to home and to work inside the house. They were often considered different, and to some extent judged differently compared to their illiterate sisters. For example, it was accepted for them to be seen out of doors although some wore *chadari* (burqa). A 34 year old mother of five children complained: "Now we have to stay inside because we have no education" and yearned that "I wish I was literate and could work as a teacher!" She was born in Sujani and as child she had been to school for less than a year, before the war atrocities began and the school closed. She had three daughters, all in school, including the oldest of 13 years, who had had to leave the *madrassa* but not the *maktab*<sup>196</sup>. Several people confirmed what this mother said and many said as this father, one of the *shura* members in Sujani: "Women should work inside but if they are educated they can of course work outside". Almost all the schoolgirls wished to become teachers and doctors. Anisa, a 13 year old student in Charbagh girl school, referred to the principle of *farz* in education and stated seriously: "It is an obligation for a woman to work outside and help others if she has education". A classmate of hers was less confident: "No, women cannot work outside. Our people don't do so, we don't allow women to work outside even if they are educated". After a short pause she added "but I think it is good if women do so, work outside". This girl planned to continue her studies at the medical faculty but if that would not be possible, she thought that her education in *maktab* would be useful for her as a mother and housewife too. "Education is good to have for rearing your own children also".

## Mothers and wives also need education

"It is always good to be literate," declared a mother in Sujani, "illiterate farmers don't know anything. My daughter is literate. She does many good things, although she

<sup>195</sup> Ahmed (1980) writes in his description of a Pashtun society in the 1970s in the Pakistani tribal areas: "Women may graze sheep alone or help in reaping the harvest unarmed and unescorted since rape or abduction of Pukthun women is unknown..." (p. 204). Dupree (1996) describes the freedom of mobility women enjoy, particularly in mountainous areas.

<sup>196</sup> In spring 2006, she was still in school, in grade five.

started school only recently”.

As described earlier, education was considered something good in itself. In general, educated people were held in high esteem and expected to act and behave with good *akhlaq*. Through education, children were assumed to learn good morals and girls should learn the same ethical rules as boys. However, in terms of behaviour, many respondents determined that girls and boys should accomplish different types of conduct, some of which have been described previously. A teacher in Sujani explained the difference:

Men and women are expected to have the same morals but they live separately so boys and girls should learn different behaviour, I mean, the social behaviour is different. Our social values teach us to how to behave ...Women become mothers, men become fathers, which means that they have different jobs and that they need to learn different things.

It was believed that a woman with an education would have learnt good manners and so be more capable as a housewife and more competent in raising her children. A father from Charbagh stressed this point when he thought about his own daughters as future mothers. “I hope” he said, “that my daughters become good mothers with basic Islamic knowledge so that they can raise themselves and their children according to Islam... that they can make good people of their children”.

The father who scorned illiterate women as ignorant and misbehaving emphasised the importance of educated mothers as proponents of girls’ education said: “If women are educated they send their daughters to school, and they try to convince their husbands to do so. I was educated so I understand the benefits of education but my wife does not...” He also meant that “education is important for marriage [because] an illiterate girl will not be a happy wife and her husband will not be a happy husband”. He did not want to develop this further but maybe he meant that an imbalance or inequality in educational background between a husband and wife would create problems – or even be shameful, as one of the boys said (see earlier in this chapter).

### ...but not so much Islamic education

A young father, less than 30 years old, living with his wife and five children in extremely poor conditions, started his response in a very resolute manner but had modified his view by the end, a phenomena that occurred now and then with some respondents. He said: “Boys need more education than girls. Girls do not need so much, both need education, but boys need more”. With more thought he added: “We need both female and male doctors, so maybe both need the same education. Yes, it should be the same”. But thinking again, he retracted what he had said: “But boys need more Islamic education, girls need less”. He could not explain why but referred to the present situation. This is an example of what Berger & Luckman (1967) call

'habitualization'. The fact that only boys continued in the *madrasa* and learnt more about Islam had become *the* pattern and nothing else was thinkable.

The idea that girls need less Islamic education than boys was common. Boys needed more teaching about Islam since they got more teaching about Islam. A typical view was expressed when a father said:

Girls need to learn only basic things about Islam. Boys should continue in *madrasa* as long as possible but girls can go there only a few years ... since there are no female mullahs girls cannot study for a long time in *madrasa*.

The fact that girls *could not* get Islamic education to the same extent as boys, due to mullah-teachers being male, meant that they *did not need* as much education as boys. One father thought that:

girls can go to the mullah until they become big ... when they understand that they are big I don't want to send them there, not even to the mosque. Because mullahs are dangerous, they have more *Shaitan* (Satan). I have stopped my girls from going to the mullah.

Another phenomenon that 'justified' that girls should attend the *madrasa* for shorter time than boys was that it would not lead to any profession or job in their case, as "practically all mullahs and judges have to be male". These professionals require substantial knowledge about Islam and Shariah, "so therefore boys need more Islamic education" in case they should opt for holding an Islamic office. Such jobs are "not possible for women; there is no prohibition but in our society they cannot", explained one of the male teachers in Charbagh. Another teacher, a woman, shared his idea, and said: "Women don't need a high level of Islamic knowledge. They cannot become judges because they are too soft". Thus, the obstacle was two fold, the female gender (which might imply too much gentleness) and the low level of Islamic knowledge held by women.

The young female teacher in Charbagh, daughter to the deputy headmaster, thought differently from the majority. She believed that "boys and girls need the same education, also the same Islamic education. Parents must become aware that girls need Islamic education as much as boys do". A father in Sujani, himself an imam in another village, had a similar view, "all girls should go to school because female teachers are needed, also female *madrasa* teachers are needed". The idea of a female *madrasa* teacher, a female mullah, was, however, too much for male teacher in Charbagh. He had a long white beard and had worked as teacher for 43 years. He laughed, "A female mullah in the mosque? Hahaha! Girls can learn Islamic subjects in school instead but not in the mosque. Hahaha!"

In a discussion with a young imam in Charbagh the issue of women's Islamic education took a new turn. He definitely thought that girls needed but did not/could

not get as much knowledge about Islam as boys at present. He launched the idea that the solution could be to give the boys *even* more Islamic education so that they could teach their sisters, and later their wives, at home:

But honestly I have myself very little time to teach my girls at home ... a more practical and long term solution is to have female mullahs. It is possible nowa-days ... in Pakistan there are *madrasas* for girls and women, some women are even taught by male mullahs.

This idea is possible and maybe preferable. Boyle (2004) described Islamic education in Morocco, in particular, the type of schools where children learn the basics of Islam. The traditional *kuttab* has developed into a “modern traditional school” (p. 70), a pre-school, more or less organised according to the French *école maternelle* but with the learning focused on memorisation of the Quran and some elementary reading, writing and counting. Children who attend normally start in a public school after two years. The most noticeable difference compared to the “traditional school” is that only women are teachers in the *kuttab*s. The introduction of young female teachers was at first met with reluctance since women’s employment generally and as teachers of the Quran particularly, was not seen as desirable. However this view has been replaced gradually by appreciation and enthusiasm from both parents and children. The female teachers were considered to handle the children better and they “represented a way for parents to have their cake and eat it too; their kids were learning the Quran but in a gentler and developmentally “appropriate way” (ibid., p. 106).

“Yes, the same education for boys and girls but only...”

Mostly, the respondents strongly linked girls’ education to certain conditions. Provided specific arrangements were at hand, girls had the same right to education and, with the exception of Islamic education, the same need of education as boys. Not only female teachers and separate school buildings but also economy, security and safety, availability and group pressure were factors brought up that conditioned girls’ education.

If I can afford it...

Although education is free in Afghanistan, many parents said that the economic circumstances would be decisive in both boys’ and girls’ continued education, but particularly for boys’ continuation. Girls seldom contribute financially to the family

but may be needed to assist in their mothers' household work and take care of younger siblings. Boys on the other hand, might bring in some small money or be paid in kind by watching someone else's sheep or goats or working on their land. The consequence of not using children's labour was still a factor to consider when deciding about children's education. "If I can afford it. It depends on my money, maybe my children can continue up to grade 12", said a father from Sujani. Another father from Charbagh wanted his children to study up to university, "if I can afford it, if we are not hungry for many years I would like my girls to go to *madrassa* for two-three years and then to *maktab* and my sons also. I want them to study as long as possible". What would they do if school fees were charged or textbooks had to be purchased? Almost everyone declared that they would do their utmost to send their children to school anyway. However, if they had to select between the sons and daughters, there was no doubt that the sons would be sent first.. "If I had limited resources I would send my son and not my daughter, sons are for outside and they stay with us when we are old", was how one father justified his choice. Boys were often connected to the 'outside' world, having the responsibility (to increase when adults and family providers) for all contacts with societal institutions, government officials, schoolteachers and mosque imams as well as with bazaar merchants and bus drivers. Another father who chose his son in the first hand would ask them to teach his daughters at home. Only one parent had a divergent view: "If I had money only for one child I would send a daughter... I feel more responsible for my girls, and according to Allah I have more responsibilities for the girls". Another father did not see any risk that school fees would be introduced, stating, "there are no fees ... there will never be any fees... it is said in the new constitution. So there is no use to worry".

When parents in Afghanistan are old, they depend on the support of their son(s). However, parents without sons are not left to survive the best they can because nephews (sons of the father's brother/s) take over the responsibility to provide for sonless uncles and aunts. Nevertheless, the hard realities make sons more attractive than daughters for parents, as sons will contribute to the material welfare of the family. The view that sons are more valuable and preferred than daughters is shared by all people; or at least this is what everybody believed that everybody believed. However, when we asked whether more boys or girls were preferred in the family, the answers did not fully comply with this assumption. In Charbagh, all fathers claimed that sons or daughters did not make any difference. They often referred to Allah saying: "All our children are from Allah". One father referred to the first Muslims: "When a child was born, the Prophet and his caliphs slaughtered one sheep for a son but two for a daughter because a girl is *ajiza barkha* (defenceless)". He explained he preferred his own daughter to his sons because "my oldest daughter is more courageous than all my five sons together. I like her more than my sons". All Charbagh mothers (except two, both with Western type of education, who claimed that both sons and daughters are as good) clearly stated that they favoured boys because "daughters get married and go

away but the boys stay with us and serve the parents”.

Thus, all Charbagh parents with Western type of education held the view that boys and girls were equally valuable for a family. One may reflect on whether their educational background had influenced their belief, or whether education had made them express a more diplomatic and ‘modern’ opinion on this issue. The illiterate or barely literate fathers in Charbagh who claimed that girls or boys make no difference each already had more than four sons. This might have contributed to their standpoints and made the issue of more sons or daughters a matter of no concern.

The same patterns were not so easily seen in Sujani. Less than half of the fathers held the view that sons and daughters are equally preferred. Among those who thought that sons or daughters did not make any difference, there were some with secondary education and some were illiterate and had between two and five sons each. Some of those who preferred boys had *maktab* education while others had not. All the mothers, except one, preferred sons (none of the interviewed mothers had *maktab* education). Only one father, aged 58, favoured daughters. He had six daughters and four sons, was a member of the *shura* and had completed his secondary education. He said: “I think it is good to have both boys and girls, it does not matter. They are both from Allah. But I prefer to have girls”. He referred to Islam but could not provide any other, more concrete reason. As an elder and as member of the *shura* he might have wished to demonstrate his knowledge about Islam<sup>197</sup>. He also thought that he was more responsible for the upbringing of his daughters compared to his sons.

### If security allows...

That the war was not far away was reflected in many responses and the present peace was by no means taken for granted. Periods of cease-fires had happened before and had been broken again and again. Foreign troops were still in the country. “If there is security and peace...” was repeated numerous times almost like a mantra, in particular when girls’ education was discussed. It was seen that a father has a special responsibility for his daughters as long as they are in his custody. He has to protect his girls, as one father from Charbagh said:

How long the girls can go to school depends on our society and the security, if these things are good, they can continue up to grade 12, and if there are boarding facilities even up to university, I would allow that. But if she is married it is up to her husband to decide.

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<sup>197</sup> It is not likely that he wanted to impress the interviewer, Pia, a Western woman. Neither had he heard of the Convention of the Rights of Children, which stipulates the same worth of boys and girls.



### If the school is close...

A father should protect his daughters not only from dangers like shooting and fighting but also from the gaze of unknown males. Consequently, school must be available within walking distance from home.

In the lower grades, girls are usually too small to walk too far, and later they are too big to walk a long distance without a male escort. For one father it was simple, "how long my girls will continue in school depends on the distance to school. If the school is far away, and girls have to leave early in the morning and come back only late in the evening, it will not be possible". According to another father it might be a possibility though: "My girls can continue in school as long as they can and school is available and the conditions are acceptable. If school is far away *we will see if they can go or not*<sup>198</sup> [our emphasis]".

### If there is Islam in *maktab*...

*Maktab* education should not only be "in accordance with Islam", which was interpreted as gender separated education, but should also teach about Islam. As mentioned earlier, Islamic education was generally considered very important not only in the *madrasa* but also in the *maktab*, and quite a few respondents regarded the present amount of time spent on this subject in *maktab* as far too little. The subject was even more important for girls because of their preclusion from more advanced Islamic learning in the *madrasa* due to the fact that they were not allowed in the mosque after passing the childhood stage. This means the responsibility to teach girls about Islam rests primarily with the *maktab*, the only institution where girls currently have possibility to spend many years of education.

A young male teacher in Charbagh thought that girls' education in *maktab* would become more accepted if the time spent on Islam and on other subjects were more equal. He asked rhetorically: "If we have to study English four hours every week, why not four hours of Islam?"

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<sup>198</sup> We conducted a survey (through an assistant) in another, nearby village where 48 per cent of the school age girls did not attend any type of education. 31 per cent went only to the mosque school only and only 21 per cent attended *maktab* also. 88 per cent of the boys attended both *maktab* and mosque schools. The reason for not allowing girls to school was, according to 60 per cent of the parents, the distant location of the *maktab* (30 minutes walking distance). 12 per cent thought that the mosque school provided sufficient education for girls.



### If there are separate schools...

Can boys and girls go together in the same school? “No, no, no! Schools should be separate for boys and girls. If they are together in school there will be problems”, yelled one of the fathers. He did not want to enter into what kind of problems; “you know what I mean”, he said to Amir. Probably, he was afraid that boys and girls would fall in love with consequences that would ruin the tradition of arranged marriages and lead to trouble regarding relations between families. In general, people were concerned about the boys gossiping about the girls, which might destroy their daughters’ chances for good marriages.

In the mosque school, boys and girls were co-educated, to which no one had any objection or even seemed to think about (as the girls were “small”). But mixed classes in *maktab* were unthinkable, even in the lower grades. Separate classrooms were not liked either, a separate school building was preferred and frequently put as a condition for girls’ education. In Sujani, however, the villagers had accepted three tents for the girls placed at a distance of some 50 meter from the boys’ school building. If there is no school building “girls can continue [to study] but inside houses, in home schools or in Quran schools”, said a father from Charbagh. He had ten children, five sons and five daughters, but only the youngest girls went to school.

It was believed that co-education past toddlerhood was against Islam. However, it is difficult to find a text in the Quran or among the *hadiths* that supports such an idea. Rather, the Afghan tradition of gender separation is behind this conviction. Men and women live in separate spheres to a great extent, and have done so for centuries. It is said to be part of the Afghan culture. On the other hand, many men and women of the older generation witnessed that this ‘culture’ did not manifest itself in such a strict gender division a generation or two ago. Women were not covered top to toe, and they were not confined to the house all their lives. On the contrary, they were active participants in agriculture activities and were seen frequently shopping in the bazaar, for example. Is the current separation due to the ‘modernity’ represented by Western type of education? Separate schools for boys and girls were the rule wherever British and French colonialists introduced education some 100 - 200 years ago (and later copied into Afghanistan). This was the rule also in Sweden, for example, for students above the primary grades. Or have the many years of war redefined and sharpened the gendered roles? During the wars men left their houses for the mountains and women stayed at home with the children and the elderly. Men fought and women cared. Have the wars and the consequences therefore forced women back into an even more veiled and passive position? Or maybe the emphasis on gender separation and strict adherence to gender roles is a response to globalisation?

## If there are female teachers...

But the most important condition mentioned by almost everyone was that girls must be taught by female teachers when they are “big”. Every father and practically all the mothers, as well as teachers and mullahs shared this opinion. The students, on the other hand, had other ideas, as we will see.

‘Big’ is a relative concept but referred generally to girls in the beginning of puberty. There were different ideas as to when that period started, varying from ten and fifteen years. A female teacher was a prerequisite from grades three or four (the ages of girls in these grades both in Sujani and Charbagh varied from nine to fifteen, due to delayed starts and/or repetition of grades). A typical view was expressed by this father: “Both boys and girls should study up to the same level and study the same content. The only difference is that girls should have female teachers and boys should have male teachers”. Another father had a similar opinion:

The most important condition for girls’ education is that female teachers are teaching them. They can go to school until they are grown up, up to grade 11 or 12. It is *farz* [with education] but the condition is female teachers.

We asked him: You say it is *farz* for both boys and girls but if female teachers are not available?”, and he answered: “I don’t know, it is *farz* for girls too... but ... I don’t know ... how to solve this dilemma?!”

This father was not the only one who faced a problem when confronted with these two principles. Indeed, many seemed to suffer from the predicament this clash constituted. He, and most people believed, that according to Islam, it is compulsory for everyone to seek knowledge. To acquire knowledge, to get education is an enterprise that has to be taken seriously by all human beings, male as well as female. Consequently, both boys and girls must go to school. Allah has not decreed girls’ education to be restricted compared to boys’, not as regards *maktab* nor as regards *madrasa* education. On the other hand, and this conviction seemed to be as strong as the belief in the principle of *farz* in education, girls cannot be taught by male teachers. Girl students and male teachers is a completely impossible combination. It is absolutely inappropriate. Out of question. This was the conclusion of a long discussion with *shura* members in Sujani and when we pressed them with the question, “but which principle is strongest? Obligatory education or separate education?” we could almost see their minds twist and how the conflict plagued them. But it was not possible to get an unambiguous answer.

However, individual fathers could find a solution to the present situation by waiting:

*When* we get proper conditions, *when* we have separate buildings and female teachers, *then* girls can go to school as long as boys [our emphasis]. Now boys should continue until they get proper knowledge but girls only until they get basic knowledge about Islam and until they have learnt to read and write.

This was how one of the fathers worked out the quandary. Another way of solving the dilemma was to accept the situation as unchangeable: “Girls should have the same education but the conditions don’t allow girls to continue. There are no female teachers, neither in the *madrasa* nor in *maktab*”.

Usually, the fact that girls could not get the same Islamic education as boys was accepted as an irrefutable truth. For some people, however, who sincerely believed that *farz* in education counted also for girls, the biggest and most difficult issue was how girls should get the opportunity to learn as much as boys about Islam. One of the fathers said:

We cannot send our girls to *madrasa* because there are no female mullahs. We can send them to *maktab* if there are female teachers. Both boys and girls should in theory study the same but in practice it is not possible as there are no female mullahs.

Women were teaching in the girls’ *maktabs* but in the *madrasa* only men had taught. The mosque school and the *madrasa* represent tradition, and traditionally, only men are mullahs. The Western type of school, the *maktab*, represents modernity and in the modern world women can also teach.

### But maybe male teachers are an alternative?

In Sujani the shortage of female teachers was acute and the possibility for girls to continue in school after grade three was very uncertain at the time of the field study. Therefore, the issue of male teachers for girls came up in several discussions (which seldom happened in Charbagh as there had been female teachers from grade one up to secondary school for many years). Not a single father but quite a few mothers and almost all the students in Sujani kept the door open for male teachers in girl classes. Mothers mostly preferred female teachers but they realised the shortage and the need to be pragmatic. “Girls should go to both *maktab* and *madrasa* as long as boys! I don’t think it is a problem for girls to have a male teacher. It does not matter, not even in secondary school”, declared a young mother in Sujani. How to convince others, notably the husbands, was a problem. “We always look for what others will say”, explained one mother “but if other families allow their daughters to go to school with a male teacher I would also do so”. Someone had to start and one mother with a daughter in grade three was willing to be the first so that others could follow. She declared: “The girls must

continue in grade 4, even with a male teacher. I will allow my girl to continue”.

For the boy students in Sujani, the sex of the teacher in girl classes was generally no problem. Jahid, a 16-year-old boy in grade five declared simply that “male teachers can teach girls, both small and big girls”. Most students, also the girls, shared his view. Anisa, a Charbagh girl said: “We want to have female teachers but if they were not available, we would ask our parents to allow us to be taught by male teachers. We would like to study also with a male teacher. It is possible also for bigger girls”. And Fatima thought that male teachers “don’t come for anything else but teaching”. “They are like fathers”, said another girl.

## “No, less education is enough for girls”

The initial survey recorded the number of school age children per family, that is, sons and daughters aged six to fourteen years and their attendance or non-attendance at *madrasa* and/or *maktab*. A child’s age is, as reported earlier, not meticulously recorded in Afghanistan; there is no birth registration, birthdays are not celebrated and a child’s (as well as an adult’s) age is usually told only approximately<sup>199</sup>. It is likely that some children (particularly girls), aged 12 – 14 years, were not reported in the school age group and so not included in the survey. They might have been considered more or less as adults and therefore overlooked. Since we wanted to find out the particular reasons preventing girls from attending school, we made a purposeful sampling. Of the 42 families selected for interview in both villages 13 did not have any daughters in school, although according to the survey, they had daughters aged 6 – 14 years. Six of these 13 girls were claimed to be “too big” for school and some went to “accelerated learning classes” or to the girl *madrasa* in Charbagh. In three cases the families lived in the outskirts of Sujani with the long distance to school brought up as a reason that their girls only went to the more closely located mosque school. Only one parent mentioned the need for the girls’ labour at home (which might have been the reason also for those who thought their daughters to be “too big” for school). One parent preferred a solely Islamic education for their daughter and two parents could not give any reason at all.

As reported in the previous section, all respondents in both villages with a few exceptions accepted that girls received less Islamic education than boys. The traditional *madrasa* had always been an institution only for boys, and the mosque school allowed only small girls as students. Such had been the situation for generations and hardly anyone saw any reason or possibility to alter the present state of affairs. Some found it unfair and “unislamic” that girls were excluded but did not see any prospects for change. Only one or two could imagine a female mullah in the future, which would

<sup>199</sup> When we asked a girl, who reported her age to be around 13, when she was born, she did not know but said that her mother had told her that her age was 13.

give girls the same right as boys to an Islamic education.

Girls' right to and need for education in *maktab*, on the other hand, was less questioned - although there were quite a few who considered a few years of primary education to be enough, "girls should not be in school too long". It should be kept in mind that education for girls is new in Afghanistan, particularly in rural areas. For the first time ever a girl school opened in Sujani in 2002 (except for a short-lived experiment in 1978). In spring 2004, the school had started its third year. Now everyone knew about its existence, and it was generally accepted that also girls should go to school. Some respondents may have been vague in their statements, and others set up quite a few conditions but no one expressed a view that completely ruled out girls from participation in *maktab* education. It seems as if the first barrier had been overcome.

## Barriers are overcome but more remain

### The first barrier

Although no one was against girls' education *per se*, quite a few thought that only a few years in *maktab* were enough for girls. They believed that girls needed not only fewer years of Islamic education but also less primary education compared to boys. Around one quarter of all parents clearly voiced this opinion, as many in Sujani as in Charbagh, and all of them were fathers except for two mothers in Charbagh. One mother was from a recently settled *kuchi* family who had four sons, all in school and four daughters, all at home. "I need the girls at home," she explained. The other mother declared that "*madrassa* is for boys and *maktab* is for girls" but referred to her husband to explain why her daughters did not need more than three years education, saying that "my husband is against that our girls should continue after grade three".

"Let them study when they are small but when they are big they should quit school" was a typical statement from this group of parents, or fathers rather, who thought that three to four years in school were sufficient. "Until they are big", meant up to "11 or 12 years, not more" for some but a little longer for others, "12 to 14 years". Obviously, this group had no intention of educating their daughters beyond primary level. Others conditioned the stay in school upon girls' physical development and said: "Girls can go to school until they have become women"; "girls should not be in school too long, they should prepare for their coming houses"; or they could go to school "until they marry". Marriage was a predestined phase in life, "it is OK that boys and girls study up to the same level", said one father, "but it is not possible since girls grow up and marry".

When asked at what age it is most appropriate for girls to marry, respondents

in this group of parents commonly thought 15 -16 years an appropriate age. Some believed that even 14 year old girls were mature enough for marriage. Such an early marriage age eliminates further education and confirms the view held by these fathers that many years of education had no meaning for their daughters. They wished to hold on to the traditional village life where girls from an early age spent time on preparation for marriage and not on school subjects. They feared the spread of the 'city spirit' with what they saw as disastrous consequences for girls. Girls should, as before, marry in their early teens, and live as their mothers and grandmothers had as housewives and mothers inside the houses and compounds. Further, the girl should be younger than the boy when they marry "so she can have many children, so she doesn't get too old too quickly". However, a few years of education was accepted, indeed desired by this group, since when they became mothers, girls would have use for literacy abilities. A few years of education would not jeopardise the long-established way of life these fathers considered the best. One can say that this group accepted the crossing of a first barrier, that is, they allowed their girls to start school, study for a few years but then return home. A few years could not be harmful, but rather advantageous. Also, as some mothers indicated, when small, girls may as well go to school but when they have grown a little and become more able to work in the household, they should quit school. In this group all ranked themselves as poor and only a few of the fathers had any formal education.

Some background data of the parents who accepted the crossing of the first barrier and allowed girls to study a few years in *maktab* is provided in the table below (Table 14.1).

**Table 14. 1: Background data of parents who accepted 2-3 years of primary education for girls<sup>200</sup>.**

Sujani				Charbagh			
Sex/Age	Econ	Maktab	Marriage	Sex/Age	Econ	Maktab	Marriage
F 25	poor	0	17	F 41	poor	11	17
F 64	poor	0	15	F 60	poor	0	15
F 50	poor	6	14	F 45	poor	0	15
F 50	poor	3	14	M 35	poor	0	15
F 38	poor	0	15	M 30	poor	0	15

Legend: F: father; M: mother; Econ: own economic ranking; Marriage: appropriate marriage age for girls.

Fatima, a girl in Charbagh, thought that if men have education they permitted their

<sup>200</sup> Included in this group are families who did not have any daughter in school, referring to the girl's too high age or the need for her labour at home.

daughters to go to school. She said: "If a father has not studied himself, he doesn't allow his girls to go to school". One of the fathers interviewed, an interesting but exceptional case, contradicts this belief. He had in his youth almost finished secondary education (he had had to leave after grade 11) and had several years of Islamic education. He told, "I am half mullah myself and know some 30-40 suras by heart". He was happy to have many daughters: "I have six girls and two sons, but I don't mind, they are all from Allah ... I don't agree with the thinking that it is better to have more boys ... as insurance for the parents' old age". He expressed some 'modern' ideas about child rearing, "I have never beaten my children ... it is *haram*...completely against Islam". We asked whether boys and girls could play with the same type of toys and he thought (contrary to all others) that boys could play with dolls and girls with cars, saying "I have no problem with that". Further, he believed that girls should not marry until 18-20 years of age and declared that he was not the sole decision-maker of the family: "I don't do anything without my wife's agreement ...we don't do anything without consulting each other". He considered girls to be better students than boys, and he thought that educated women should work outside home.

Against this background one might expect him to be a strong proponent for girls' education but he was not. "Girls can go to school until they have learnt to read and write ... The majority doesn't think as I do any longer. Many people send their girls to school for longer time. But we think so because we are *Pashtuns!*", he said laughingly.<sup>201</sup> For his own daughters he had selected the mosque school and the new *madrassa* for girls saying that to learn "Islamic values is good for their future, they will live in this village all their life, and therefore Islamic knowledge can help them, also to become good mothers". For his sons the plans were different. They were students in the *maktab* and they were expected to become teachers because "teachers are the source of knowledge and teachers are highly respected". He added: "Boys are like the right rib, you know, everything is done by the right hand but girls are like the left rib. There is only little responsibility put on girls".

These quotations show that the issue of girls' education is complex and does not coalesce with what would be the predicted answers or actions. The reality is not black and white. People have many different views and ideas, which to our understanding may appear contradictory but from their point of view make sense.

## The second barrier

If the first barrier has to do with acceptance of girl's education as such, the second refers to continuation in school when girls are close to or have entered puberty. Few were prepared to propose further education without reservations, as we have seen. Why? Were the prerequisites – separate building, safe and short distance to school

<sup>201</sup> This man was a Dari speaker, an example of how ethnic and linguistic groups can be mixed.



and female teachers – yet another, more sophisticated way to say that girls should be satisfied with less education than boys? Or was it a conviction, which strongly approved of girls education under acceptable forms (and which sometimes clashed with the principle of *farz* and so caused a catch-22 situation)?

There were parents (one third in total, half of whom were mothers) who clearly expressed a deeply felt awareness, an honestly felt concern for the girls to get education in accordance with what they considered as appropriate circumstances. They undoubtedly supported girls' education, provided a woman's honour and dignity was preserved, up to and sometimes including university studies. Several fathers in this group had been students of *maktab*, often for more than eight years and two also had several years of Islamic education. All except one (who said his daughters were too old) had girls in school, from grade one to grade six. All of them believed that girls should be 18 - 20 years of age when they married, not younger and most were from Sujani. A clear majority ranked themselves as belonging to the middle layer as regards economical situation.

**Table 14.2: Background data of parents who accepted 12 years of education for girls**

Sujani				Charbagh			
Sex/Age	Econ	Maktab	Marriage	Sex/Age	Econ	Maktab	Marriage
F 33	middle	11	18	F 58	middle	8	18
F 40	middle	8	18	F 35	poor	2	20
F 52	middle	0	18	M 36	middle	12	18
F 50	poor	0	-				
F 58	middle	12	20				
M 30	rich	0	20				
M 34	middle	0	20				
M 40	middle	0	20				
M 25	poor	0	20				
M 40	middle	0	20				
M 34	poor		20				

Legend: F: father; M: mother; Econ: own economic ranking; Marriage: appropriate marriage age for girls.

Others who emphatically put up conditions for girls' education seemed to do so as a way to preclude the advancement of girls' education, maybe as an attempt to prevent the new times from coming in. This group of parents frequently contradicted themselves. At first they appeared as strong proponents for education on equal terms but then they required girls to leave school at an early stage. This group also holds around one third of the parents. (It should be noted that a small group of around ten per cent holds respondents with answers too vague or too limited to be interpreted here).



The respondents in this group of “contradictors” were all fathers with two exceptions, namely three mothers from Charbagh. This group also believed in education for girls as long as it was “in accordance to Islam”, that is in a separate girl school close to home and with female teachers. They clearly stated that girls and boys should have the same education and study up to the same level, to grade 12 or more, but they were more evasive in other responses. For example, one father first declared that both girls and boys should study up to grade 14 but later said that girls should study only until they were literate. Another one said on one occasion that “my daughters can continue up to grade 12 and if there are boarding facilities even in university”, but to another question answered that girls should go to school “until they are big”. He said that boys could go on longer “because boys are for outside and girls are for houses”. Yet another father was convinced that girls and boys should study the same content and up to the same level, but thought the appropriate marriage age for girls was 14 years and for boys 20 years. Another example was the father who thought that girls could go to *maktab* “also when they are big” and expected both his sons and daughters to “get comfortable jobs as teachers or so”. On the other hand, he said that “boys need more education than girls” and regarded a woman’s place to be inside the house. As a further example, a mother in Charbagh with four daughters first said that both boys and girls should study up to grade 12 but to another question said, “no, boys should have more education because girls get married”. The statements made by this group of parents were more normative than actual

All fathers in this group except one had a *maktab* education, and one of the mothers was a teacher with a completed secondary education. Two of the fathers had an extensive Islamic education. All except three had daughters in school, from grade one and in the case of Charbagh, up to grade six. Those who did not allow their daughters to attend school claimed that the girls were too old or that the school was too far away.

**Table 14.3: Background data of parents who held contradictory views as regards girls’ education up to grade 12.**

Sujani				Charbagh			
Sex/Age	Econ	Maktab	Marriage	Sex/Age	Econ	Maktab	Marriage
F 55	poor	4	17	F 37	poor	4	15
F 27	middle	5	18	F 50	poor	0	15
F 28	middle	8	18	F 40	rich	14	15
F 42	middle	8	18	F 28	poor	1	15
F 45	middle	14	14	F 37	middle	6	15
				M 35	poor	0	20
				M 27	middle	12	20
				M 30	middle	0	19

Legend: F: father; M: mother; Econ: own economic ranking; Marriage: appropriate marriage age for girls.

## A new barrier every year?

In the struggle for girls' education, the girls seem to have won the first battle: girls can and should go to school. The present challenge refers to how long a time girls should spend in school, a matter closely linked to a gender separated education. Whether this contest will be over only when there are sufficient number of female teachers or whether male teachers will be accepted for girls after grades three or four is not possible to predict. Further, girls may have to convince their parents, notably their fathers, to overcome yet a new barrier for every new year of education. Moreover, as education beyond primary level clashes with the traditional attitudes of what constitutes the proper marriage age for girls, the matter becomes more complicated.

Students were more prepared to fully accept equal rights in education. Among the students there were only two boy students in Charbagh who claimed that girls should go to *maktab* for shorter time. Sahak in grade six stated: "Boys should study longer because they have nothing else to do but girls have to do housework, they are [intended] for housework". Students seldom seemed to hold contradictory views. They were usually very optimistic as regards the future situation for girls' education. A 13 year old boy in grade four with four younger brothers and sisters in school, was sure: "Girls will continue, now they are coming more and more. If female teachers are not available, there is no other way than to allow men to teach them". The girls themselves were often very decisive and confident. Kamila, a girl in grade five in Charbagh, said that if her parents did not want her to continue up to grade 12 she was sure she could convince them. Rahila, another girl in grade six and daughter to the deputy headmaster, categorically ruled out the possibility to marry someone who would not allow her to work outside the home, asserting that "I would never marry such a man!"

## Different experiences of girls' education

### Do female teachers really make a difference?

In general, the attitudes towards girls' education did not differ much between the two villages. Among the fathers, there was only a minority in both villages who clearly and unambiguously expressed the will and intention to educate their daughters for as long as their sons. The only difference between the fathers was that the Charbagh fathers very seldom mentioned the particular conditions that the fathers of Sujani found indispensable. This is probably because a girl school with female teachers had existed for a long time in Charbagh and was taken for granted.

Among the mothers, on the other hand, the attitudes towards girls' education differed considerably. While all mothers in Sujani clearly favoured equal participation

in education, and wished their girls to continue at least up to grade 12, and some could even imagine using a male teacher for their daughters to achieve this goal, the Charbagh mothers were more hesitant. Only one mother, a teacher, was clear on this issue while the others either contradicted themselves or believed a primary level education to be sufficient. Regarding marriage age, mothers generally thought that girls should wait until 20 years before they married, but in Charbagh there were a few mothers who believed that girls could marry around 15. These mothers did not like education after primary school for their daughters either.

One cannot draw far-reaching conclusions of these similarities and differences since the sample is fairly small. It is, however, tempting to make some reflections as the girls' schooling experience is so different in the two villages. In Sujani, the girl school still had the charm of novelty, it represented something new and symbolised a hope for future. For the village women, education entailed a possibility for change and prospects of a better life. The optimism in Sujani was to a high degree connected with the school. Hopes for the future were associated with education for girls as well as boys. In the case of the fathers though, the expectations were mainly linked to their sons.

Conversely, after decades of operation, the Charbagh girl school had recently suffered a long period of closure and had had to accept a clandestine education for girls. There was uncertainty as to whether this situation would reoccur. Additionally, not far away, a girl school had recently been set on fire. Despite the existence of a school with nine grades and despite the fact that girls were taught by female teachers, a great majority of the female students did not continue into secondary school. They tended to quit after grade three or four. Why? People might ask whether the many girls and young women who had studied in the Charbagh school over the years had achieved a better life than their sisters without an education. Few of the former students worked "outside". Maybe the extremely limited job market for women had cooled down the interest for girls' education in Charbagh. What is the use of many years of education for girls if they nonetheless stayed at home? With a completed secondary education, girls in Charbagh could hope for one employment only, as a teacher in the girl school. Realising that the girl school only employed around 30 teachers, future job prospects for the hundreds of girls in school were not promising.

As mentioned, the headmaster pointed to another reason for the weakened interest, namely the emergence of the "accelerated learning classes" where girls were remunerated for participation. That girls preferred these classes to continuation in *maktab* may indicate that school completion is no goal. A graduation certificate weighs less than a sack of wheat or a can of cooking oil. The latter responds to a real need while the first does not.

Finally, the security situation in the area was certainly another factor that negatively influenced girls' attendance.

In Sujani, the most pressing issue to solve was to find women to teach in the girl school since the continuation was very uncertain even for the upcoming year. The time

was not yet mature for thoughts about the future utility of girls' education. Secondary education was available in 2006 in the district capital only for boys. For girls there was a secondary school only in the provincial capital, which was definitely too far away for the Sujani girls (unless lodging with relatives was possible). Yet there was a hopeful wait-and-see attitude prevailing. In Sujani hardly anyone had graduated from a secondary school while Charbagh had seen many, both boys and girls, complete at least some years of secondary school. Some, primarily boys, had continued to university and got employment in the cities or had returned as a teacher or some other type of government official. To graduate from secondary school was not an alien phenomenon in Charbagh.

### Does the parents' educational background matter?

Inhabitants of Charbagh had in general more contacts with the world outside the traditional farming community. The village had experience of education for boys and girls over a long period and many fathers and quite a few mothers had studied for several years. They had experienced the need for and the pleasure of education. Still, they were against education on equal terms for girls and boys. It seems that parents' experience in *maktab* education was not enough to make neither the fathers nor the mothers more positive toward girls' education.

### Does the parents' socio-economic background matter?

In both villages positive attitudes toward girls' education above primary level were strongly related to a better economic status. It seemed to be the only factor of importance in both villages. Whether poor families needed their older girls to labour at home, although their work seldom or never brought any income to the family, or whether investment in education for girls above a certain age was regarded a waste since they would marry into another family, was not verified, but such claims were often made. It should also be kept in mind that this study's estimate of a family's economic situation was very imprecise since it was based on the respondents' own estimation. Usually, those who ranked themselves as middle or rich also had some years of education, an indication of that the combination of wealth and education may count while only one of these factors does not.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The principle of *separation* in education, that is sex-segregated teaching by sex-matched teachers, emanates from the tradition of overall gender segregation predominant in Afghan society. Further, *maktab* education came from a Western tradition of separate classes, which lingered until the middle of the 20th century in the West.

In general, girls' education in *madrasa* and in *maktab* was not only accepted, it was appreciated and even advocated for by the respondents, although some parents considered the time spent in education should be shorter for girls than for boys. For the great majority, certain conditions were required for girls' education – a short distance to school, separate school buildings and female teachers – at least beyond elementary level. However, the students themselves, boys as well as girls, were prepared to accept male teachers for girls. More than half of the parents favoured a complete secondary education for girls provided appropriate conditions were at hand. However, since a low marriage age was preferred, secondary education will not be an option for many girls.

Overall, mothers were more positive than fathers, while a parent's educational background seemed to be of little importance in relation to attitudes toward girls' education. Economic conditions were more important.

The Charbagh girls' school is among the oldest of girl schools in Afghanistan. This long experience and the fact that girls were taught by female teachers up to secondary level did not seem to have influenced female retention in education.

The principle of *farz* in education, which obliges everyone, women and men, girls and boys, to seek knowledge and get an education, is a principle all the respondents sincerely believed. However, it collided with the principle of separation and caused a difficult-to-solve dilemma.

## Chapter Fifteen

# Global and Local Pressure on Education

Globalisation processes, a global polity and a hegemonic culture, the increasing interdependency between nations, organisations and people by way of a global economy dominated by the USA, and the implications for educational systems worldwide have been described in *Chapter 6 Globalisation*. In *Chapter 10 Afghanistan and Globalisation*, the effects of globalisation on Afghanistan were discussed. In this chapter we trace the changes, real or perceived, that have occurred in the two villages, according to the respondents. The focus in the current chapter is on changes to education but sometimes examples from other fields are also included.

### Global pressure for a Western type of education – some implications

Generally, there is a global pressure on governments to expand and improve education, including provision of equal access to girls and women (often due to the need for low-cost labour rather than for equality reasons) (Carnoy, 2000). Chapters 9 and 10 of this thesis delineated how clearly this pressure is manifested in Afghanistan via the goals prescribed by the Education For All declaration (as elaborated in Jomtien and Dakar) and the Millennium Goals (as adapted to the Afghan context).

The insistence with which the international community has pressed the Afghan government to re-establish education has caused an extraordinarily rapid expansion of educational facilities. In fact, the expansion started almost from scratch only five or six years ago after the defeat of the *Taliban* in late 2001, and the subsequent entry of Western aid. Due to external forces but also, and increasingly, to internal demand, the government has been pressurised to increase access to education and to enhance girls' participation in education. Donors pushed the Ministry of Education to include new, never-heard-of subjects and to print textbooks accordingly<sup>202</sup>. As mentioned before, the number of students in Afghanistan, particularly in primary education, has increased by several hundred percent, and recently girls have been enrolling into education more than ever before.

The villagers, parents as well as teachers and students, have felt the effects of the

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<sup>202</sup> However, after four years, new donor representatives have other preferences and seem to be reluctant to finance printing of the same textbooks.

rapid expansion of education. In Sujani in 2002, the primary school began functioning properly, after running intermittently during the late 1970s, and the girl school was a completely new establishment. In the same year Charbagh schools also re-started after many years of closure.

Moreover, both villages were introduced to new forms of education including accelerated learning classes, literacy courses for women, Quran schools for girls, and community based schools. New providers of education also appeared from international and national NGOs of many different orientations. The new actors came with new demands and completely new concepts such as ownership, school committees, community involvement, teacher-parents associations and so forth. The villagers had met some typical aspects of the “globalised education” phenomenon, and so how did they react and how did they perceive the new school and the new times?

### More schools – but less education?

The global pressure to expand education includes both expanded access to schools and expansion of the time spent in schools. It also includes, not least in Afghanistan, additional educational opportunities for girls. Many parents, particularly in Sujani, highly appreciated that access to *maktab* education had increased. “Now there are more schools and hopefully more and more will come”, was a general expectation voiced by almost everyone. Especially those fathers who had experienced the Communist school in the 1980s welcomed the new school. Most people also mentioned the changes that had brought about the initiation of girls’ education in a positive way. The fact that the opportunities for *maktab* education had increased was, however, not regarded as sufficient, proven by the many worries expressed concerning the outcomes of learning, teachers’ qualifications, loose organisation and inadequate supervision of the educational process.

Generally, it was believed that students learnt more in the previous schools, or at least had spent more time in school before. A father in Sujani who was a schoolboy for eight years in the 1970s (not in Sujani all the time) complained bitterly about the present situation: “There is much difference today. Teachers are so weak now. At my time there were very strict regulations and we learnt much more than they do today”. Another father in Charbagh summarised what many expressed:

It was much higher level previously. Now grade 12 almost equals grade 2 of my time! Schools were organised in a better way. When students were absent it was recorded and measures were taken. After these 30 years everything has collapsed. Rules and regulations do not function any longer.

In the 1970s, the school year ran for nine months (with ten days vacation after the midyear examinations) from March 7<sup>th</sup> to December 7<sup>th</sup>, or, in areas with warmer

climate, from August 22<sup>nd</sup> to May 22<sup>nd</sup>. A day in the primary school was four hours long (08.00 – 12.00) studying five lessons. By comparison, in 2004, the students of Sujani and Charbagh experienced considerably shorter school time. The school year officially started March 21, but classes did not begin until the end of March or the beginning of April. Similarly, the end of the school year was officially December 7<sup>th</sup> (as before) but the village schools closed several weeks before. According to the current primary school curriculum, there should be five lessons daily, but we observed that the students rarely spent that many hours per day in class. “Now it is up to the students themselves if they want go to school or not”, sighed a father in Sujani. As decreed by Ministry of Education, only a 50 percent attendance is required to pass from one grade to another (grades 1 – 3) compared to the pre-war rule, which required an 80 percent attendance rate. These circumstances probably contribute to what is understood by villagers as less learning in schools compared to the 1970s and earlier.

This state of affairs is not found only in Sujani and Charbagh; on the contrary, it is common all over the country as mentioned previously. A father from Sujani aired his opinion regarding the perceived too rapid expansion:

The Taliban government increased the number of *madrasas* so much that the *madrasa* lost its character. To find so many mullahs and imams with sufficient knowledge was not possible and Islamic education became too shallow. The same thing is happening today with *maktab* education. This government is now doing the same mistake with *maktab*.

Parents sometimes voiced their discontent with teachers. A father, a professional driver with university education, described his teachers when he was a schoolboy: “At that time there were very professional teachers, very good people, with good experience and they taught well and had no bad relations with the students. Today it is not so at all”<sup>203</sup>.

Both parents and teachers complained about what they perceived as lack of organisation in *maktab*. A teacher in Sujani said:

Schools are very different now. Previously, we had professional teachers. They were punctual and so were the students. Everything was better organised ... Now there are no rules ... there are no conditions for rules and order, we don't have such a situation.

A similar experience was expressed by another father in Sujani:

Schools before the wars were much better. There were stricter rules and regulations then. Now there are no laws, teachers show fake documents [faking qualification, our remark] but in reality they may only have six years of education.

<sup>203</sup> A father in Charbagh who had been a student in the 1980s when schools functioned very irregularly had, however, another experience: “Now teachers in general are more knowledgeable. They have been outside the village, sometimes outside the country and have seen other things”.



Many criticised the bad discipline in schools but usually they did not refer to the students' behaviour but rather to the teachers' lack of commitment, the headmaster's lack of control or the lack of supervision from the authorities' side. The expansion of schools all over the country does not match a similar expansion of resources at the Ministry of Education, at central, provincial or district levels.

Another example of global influences on education is the additional educational opportunities outside the formal government system offered by NGOs. In 2004, the only NGO involvement in Sujani was to provide window frames, as mentioned previously. The NGO in question had also requested the headmaster to organise regular parent-teacher meetings, and had distributed piles of logbooks for him to fill in dates of the meetings, register the present and the active participants, topics brought up, actions taken and so forth. However, the NGO had not communicated for what reason and no parent-teacher meetings had been held. Charbagh, on the other hand, had a long experience of support by SCA, and recently by many NGO newcomers. Over recent years, experts and advisers had come and gone, started and closed courses in literacy, computer skills and English, cheese making and embroidery. Most of the training was intended for girls and women, including a course in Islam, which was covered up as literacy training, as mentioned before. The headmaster believed the NGO engagement harmed not only girls' participation in *maktab* (see *Chapter 12 Maktab and Madrasa*) but also made education less efficient. Largely the same students attended both *maktab* and afternoon courses, they learnt the same things in both places and the same teachers were used in the primary school and the additional training. The additional resources provided by NGOs could have allowed more students to attend formal education or could have reduced existing class size.

In summary, the initial great appreciation for the new schooling opportunities for children that parents unanimously communicated seems to have gradually eroded through a perceived deterioration in learning outcomes, caused in turn by the lack of 'law and order', unqualified teachers and shortened school time. There might be a risk for a new backlash in education if this course of development does not change.

## Girls have changed due to education

That people's interest for girls' education had increased was a common view. "Now also rural people are interested in girls' education. Previously girl schools were only for cities", was the general opinion. Practically all respondents meant that parents' motivation and concern for girls' participation in education had grown. However, the Charbagh respondents were maybe somewhat more reluctant to acknowledge such a change of attitudes. A father in Charbagh believed:

Still 75 per cent are negative to girls' education, at least after grade six. Girls and women are part of *namus* (honour, property), if they go outdoors it is not good. In the cities it is different. I don't think the attitudes have changed in any particular way.

However, a father in Sujani saw things differently:

I think people have changed their attitudes towards girls' education. Now everyone sends their daughters to school. Earlier there was no school for girls here and people did not think about education for girls. Since a few years there is peace and there is a school for girls. Parents want their girls to go to school now. All the problems we had were due to the fact that people were not educated. If we had been to school we might have had a good life now. So for our children we should do all we can and send them to school and ask Allah to bless us if we educate them.

The mere fact that a girl school now existed was maybe one reason for the increasing interest. Another, as pointed out by another father in Sujani was the experience of girl schools in refugee camps. Others mentioned that it had become difficult to find husbands for illiterate girls. One father said: "There is a kind of competition between families. If one family sends their daughters to school, the others also want to do so". Another father suggested that previously, sending a daughter to school was as shameful as a woman who did not wear a *chadari*, that is, did not cover her head. Interestingly this comparison implies that the shame attached to women's uncovered heads would also cease to exist; although the father probably did not intend this meaning.

We asked the parents whether girls are different today compared to the time when they were children. Only one mother did not see any difference, "girls are as illiterate now as when I was a girl", she complained. Otherwise, people had many examples of changes, for example girls are different today because they go to school. Since they now are *students*, they have acquired a new identity, which their mothers in most cases had never had. Previously, this identity had been reserved for boys only (if school was available). What kind of change this particular identity had brought, and maybe more importantly, what change it might bring in the future, no one could clearly explain but it involved much reflection. The change was evident to everyone and was sometimes viewed and aired as positive and sometimes as negative. At times, the change was connected to fear, and at others to hopes. "Earlier girls were like savages", declared a former nomad, "but now they are educated and much smarter". Another father in Charbagh also believed that "girls are cleverer now, before they were more simple". One of the fathers thought that since schools are available now and since both boys and girls go to schools, girls are in general *treated* better, also by uneducated parents. They are relieved from some of the hard housework and it is accepted that they need some time for homework. Further, their mothers usually paid extra attention to their dress. However, one mother with three girls in school had found an undesirable effect,

complaining that “now girls cannot embroider any longer!”

That education was believed to foster *adab* and *akhlaq* has been discussed before, and when the changes girls have undergone was on the agenda, people again referred to girls’ manners and conduct. Girls were considered more polite, better informed and cleaner, in fact, improved hygiene among girls was mentioned quite often.

## Girls have changed their clothing

The most frequently brought up alteration, mentioned by practically all mothers and fathers, was the change in girls’ clothes. “There is a new fashion every day”, grumbled a mother in Sujani: “Girls have other clothes nowadays. They don’t use my type of clothes any longer. And there are new types of shoes everyday.” The new clothes were described as ‘Punjabi’, that is, clothes similar to those worn by people in the Pakistani province of Punjab. A father explained: “Girls now use Punjabi clothes, which look more like men’s clothes, long shirts and trousers”. The imam in Sujani resented that girls did not have their hair in plaits any longer, even at their own weddings. The frequency with which people referred to the altered mode of girls’ dress as being the most common and most obvious change when comparing contemporary girls with those of previous generations, puzzled us. Evidently, in these poor communities fashion did not or could not change every day. Girls possessed at best one pair of shoes, usually just a pair of plastic sandals and did definitely not wear different ones every day. Why did people raise this phenomenon as such an issue? For the first time during our field study, Amir, originally from a small rural village and still in close contact with rural life styles, had to struggle with his memory. What had changed? What did people actually mean? We found the clues in two statements. A relatively old father in Charbagh, declared that “girls’ clothes have changed... earlier they had more *decent* [our emphasis] clothes, which were much better”. A father in Sujani with military education at university level who had several boys and girls of various ages but only the youngest daughter in school, explained: “Now also village girls wear trousers. The *traditional* [our emphasis] clothes have gone. Now the fashion comes from Europe, Africa and America”.

Traditionally women did wear other clothes: a whole dress cut off and shirred at the waist or with a long skirt together with a wide long-sleeved blouse combined with wide, long trousers beneath, the ends of which were visible just above the ankles. Rural adult females still wear this type of dress but now the girls generally dressed similar to boys with a knee-long wide shirt or dress (in bright colours as opposed to the boys’ neutral fabric) and wide trousers underneath, almost like a *shalwar kameez*. The ends of the trousers’ legs were often embroidered or laced. The girls in Charbagh had a similar outfit but the dress was all black. It appeared like a uniform. Everyone wore a white headscarf. The female teachers wore a long skirt, blouse, jacket and a large shawl

to cover their head and breast<sup>204</sup>. The entire body was covered; only the face, hands and feet were visible. What was wrong?

The issues of Islamic dress code and particularly women's clothing are hotly debated all over the world<sup>205</sup> but at first we could not understand what caused this obsession with the female's, slightly revised, clothing. To some extent, the knee-long shirts worn by girls were tighter than women's traditional clothes and sometimes they revealed some of the wearer's body contours or displayed the form of the lower legs and calves. The skirts and jackets worn by the female teachers sometimes accentuated the woman's figure rather than concealed it, as prescribed by Islamic dress code. To deviate from what is prescribed by Islam, or what is believed to be Islamic, like the dress code for example, is offensive to many people. Obviously, however, there was another worry, a fear beneath the surface more difficult to articulate or maybe obscure to the respondents themselves.

One father in Sujani, who also thought that the main difference when comparing girls of today with his childhood friends was the clothes they wore, explained: "The whole life was simpler before, now it is more *modern* [our emphasis]." The modern life style had spread also to isolated villages. Another father argued that he knew from where the modern clothing had come:

New fashion has come also to rural areas. Also those who live on top of the mountains have heard about these new things. In the city they have cable TV and people see all kinds of things and also here in the village people see and hear about things. TV and video spread things.

He did not want to or could not elaborate on what kind of 'things' he had in mind. Contacts with the city life (and with a rapidly changing city that the provincial city represented<sup>206</sup>) were a relatively new experience for Sujani inhabitants. Window-shopping in the city attracted many people, not least shops with TVs, videos and computers for sale. TV programs were displayed and groups of mostly young boys and men gathered outside. High technology appliances and other commodities never seen or heard of attracted on-lookers but most of all the love scenes and barely dressed women dancing or otherwise in close (sexual) contact with men exerted a pull on many of the young (men). In 2004, only one inhabitant in Sujani possessed a videotape machine,

<sup>204</sup> The new girls' dress was probably imported from Pakistan. Girls had become accustomed to wearing these clothes when they lived in refugee camps. In Charbagh, the clothes symbolised '*maktab*'. There, both teachers and students wore special clothes in school.

<sup>205</sup> The custom to wear *burqa* or *chadari* is a modern phenomenon, as pointed out by the storekeeper in Charbagh girl school. He was a father of four daughters, all students in school: "Earlier there were no women around here who wore the *chadari* but now there are many." Contrary to what is generally believed, enveloping the entire body, including the head, in a *burqa*, was not an invention by the *Taliban* but a fashion of city women decades before any *Taliban* were even born. Nowadays it is more common in rural areas than in the cities.

<sup>206</sup> A number of international NGOs were in the provincial capital and foreigners were seen relatively often. Several hundred European soldiers were also stationed there.

which was like a magnet for the young men who gathered in his house to watch videos in the evenings. The older generation and also some of the young suspected that the films had a bad influence on the men and eventually on girls and women too.

In addition, images are in themselves a sensitive issue. Some people believe pictures are against Islam and regard pictures as profanity, particularly if human beings or animals are depicted. To reproduce Allah's creation is considered blasphemous.<sup>207</sup>

### An innocent childhood is gone?

For a father in Charbagh it was not only a matter of changed clothes. He looked back to an innocent childhood, which he now considered gone. He did not understand the exaggerated interest in sexuality that has oozed into people's minds:

When I was a child we did not know much. Girls, yes, all people, were more innocent. Now even small girls know many things. Even three year old girls know things they should not know about. At my time boys and girls were swimming together, naked, in the river and we did not think it was wrong. Now you cannot look even at a small girl!

The 'sexualised man' is discussed as a global phenomenon, and is generally associated with the exploitation of women and women's bodies. For example, a media researcher has found the "pornofication of the public space... [to be] extremely stereotyped [exposing] women to male heterosexual eyes" (cited in Lorentzi, 2004). Bjereld & Demker (2005) describe how the "sexual liberation has led to a new oppression of women" and how the abundant exposure of female nakedness implies a "re-sexualisation" of the society with a "pornographic explosion" and "norms disintegration" (p. 2)<sup>208</sup>. Also in Asia, in China for example, a sexualised society is crystallising according to Li Yinhe (cited in Engström, 2005) because "economic development has brought a brutal sexualisation of the Chinese society. Twenty years ago we did not have a word for 'sexy'. Sex was sinful, only for the Western upper classes" (p. 2).

To claim a 'sexualisation of the Afghan society' is maybe going too far but it is interesting that the discussion on this global phenomenon somehow has trickled down also to illiterate people in rural remote villages in the country. A poor father in Sujani with eight sons and one daughter was more outspoken than many others when he talked about the changing relations between boys and girls. He said:

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<sup>207</sup> A few of the respondents and other villagers refused to be photographed.

<sup>208</sup> Translation by Pia Karlsson

When we were children people had *haya* (shame). We did not wear *shalwar* (trousers) and neither did the girls, but we played together without any sexual looks at girls. We played as friends. At that time our hearts were pure, we had *haya* and we had Pashto. Now even small girls look like women. They are sexually attractive even when they are small. So now it is not possible for boys and girls to play together, and they cannot go to school together.

This father seems to blame the new behaviours on the girls, or maybe on girls' education. He had not sent his own daughters to school. Similarly, another aged, extremely poor father in Sujani said:

Girls are so different today. I think that things will happen, it has started already. In our village it is OK, but, but, but... [*What do you mean?*] Don't ask me more such things. The girls in the cities... I don't want to say anything more. We know what is happening. We are not happy. [*Can you explain?*] If I say something it does not help so why should I say anything. I don't want to say anything. Forget about it. It is their things. They know what they are doing.

Although he was pressed a little, he did not want to go into details. He referred to the age-old urban – rural conflict common in most societies. In the cities in Afghanistan as elsewhere people are more anonymous than in the villages and social control has a looser grip. In the village, everybody knows each other and everybody shares, or has to share, the same norms. Hardly anyone steps outside the common frame. Adolescent girls and women move around in limited areas only, and if they need to go further, male company is required<sup>209</sup>. In the cities, however, schoolgirls and female teenagers, walk together in the streets without a male escort. They chat and laugh, and may take quick glances at boys. And they are looked at in return. They are observable and visible to men and boys who do not belong to the family circle. Traditionally, a man whose daughter, sister or wife is seen by others is a weak man, not powerful enough to control and protect his females. He is subject to contempt because he has not been able to preserve his honour. A girl who has been observed by foreigners is also regarded disdainfully, and her reputation may be seriously harmed.

The parents interviewed, mainly the fathers, expressed a fear that such things would happen to their daughters and themselves. Ultimately, they seemed to be scared of losing their role as protector as well as the control of women they have had for generations.

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<sup>209</sup> In the survey reported on in *Chapter 14 Girls' Education: Obligation and Separation*, the distance to school was considered too far to allow girls to walk alone unless they had older brothers to accompany them.

## Local pressure for Islamic education – some implications

The idea of secularisation is part of globalisation and secularised education is a common feature of education in today's world. Simultaneously, another globalising factor is gaining terrain, being the rise of religious, values or moral education (Cummings et al., 2001; Karlsson & Mansory, 2004). Values education teaches about moral and character, social and personal behaviour and relations, global and national awareness, justice and equity, and of course, about religion. The struggle for values education in the Afghan *maktab*, or, in other words, the efforts to increase the subject content of Islam has already been discussed (see *Chapter 9 Education in Afghanistan*).

### Islamic education has improved

Although the quantitative expansion (improved access to and increased opportunities for) of *maktab* education was highly appreciated by the respondents, there was nevertheless a commonly held view that it had deteriorated qualitatively and students did not learn as much as they ought. Islamic education on the other hand, had not changed at all. According to the majority the content was the same as it always had been, in the Quran schools, the *madrasas*, and the mosque schools. However, some people had noticed a change as regards the teaching and perceived an improved quality in the teaching methods.

Several respondents mentioned that the mullah-teachers nowadays make more effort, “they try harder” to help children learn and “have better relations with the students”. Compared to the situation some decades ago parents generally considered the mosque schools to be much better today. “Earlier mullahs were like me!” exclaimed an illiterate father, “now mullahs are much brighter. They have modern knowledge”. He meant that the mullahs in addition to their Islamic training also had studied in the *maktab*. It is not possible to confirm or disprove the accuracy of these perceptions through our limited observations of the teaching and learning in the Quran schools, *madrasas* and mosque schools. In Sujani, the mosque schoolteachers were themselves students, *taliban* of the *madrasa*, and were quite oppositional to *maktab* education. By comparison, the only mullah of the village had studied almost as many years in *maktab* as in *madrasa*. In Charbagh, all the teachers of Islamic education we interviewed or talked to had spent quite a few years in *maktab* in addition to their Islamic education.

The villagers referred not only to the present situation when they expressed their views on Islamic education, but also to the time when they had been refugees, as internally displaced persons or in camps in Pakistan and Iran. From the beginning of the 1980s and up to 1995, the *Mujaheddin* leaders in the liberated areas, who often were *maktabees* themselves, implemented their ‘education policy’, under which



both educational systems were required but the *madrasa* included subjects taught in *maktab*, such as math, languages and geography, and the *maktab* curriculum included a considerable amount of Islamic subjects. Mullahs had to be literate and *maktab* students had to know about Islam. Similarly, the *Taliban* attempted a short-lived merge of the two systems, a *maktab-madrasa* with 50 percent of the time spent on Islamic subjects.

The refugee camps, often managed by different *Mujaheddin* parties, usually provided *madrasa* education of a different kind than what was offered in the traditional village *madrasas*. Many *maktab* subjects were included in their curriculum. The mullahs who had been students in these *Mujaheddin* or camp *madrasas* are literate and have knowledge not only about Islamic issues but also about non-religious matters. In other words, “they have modern knowledge”.

Villagers had noticed and encountered ‘modern’ mullahs and appreciated them but maybe it was their wider outlook and broader knowledge base rather than their perceived improved teaching methods that was appreciated. Referring to the mullahs’ good relations with children and their teaching abilities might be a way to justify a continuation of Islamic education and protect the Islamic values people esteemed so much. By rejecting the image of an old and backward, illiterate mullah and conjuring up a modern, clued-up teacher, parents seemed to build a defence around Islamic education. It is a ‘modern’ form of education, as up-to-date as the Western type of education in the *maktab*.

Parents suggested that the generally increased interest in Islamic education was proof of the improved situation in the Islamic schools. Since the mullahs had improved their pedagogy, children’s interest had increased. Prior to the refugee life, most people had experienced Islamic education only in the village mosque for a year or two, but in the camps they became acquainted with the “new” *madrasas*. There they achieved a more profound understanding of and knowledge about Islam. Many of these former *madrasa* students were now parents and were more appreciative of Islamic education than the previous generation of parents. “The refugee life and all the revolutions have strengthened our Muslim identity”, stated one father. Another father said: “Nowadays there are many *Qaris* even in the same family. Two to three *madrasas* have reopened in this area and also a Quran school for girls and women”.

With the relative peace and increased security, participation in education had become possible in a way it had not been for many years. The yearning for education applied to both Islamic and Western type of education. *Maktab* also provided knowledge about Islam, although far too little according to most people, and students studied Islam throughout their years in *maktab*, not only during the few years at the mosque school. For girls this meant more Islamic studies than what had ever been offered them before. So when girls participate in *maktab* education, the idea that girls can study in *madrasas* is not far away. The recently started girl *madrasa* in Charbagh shows the way.



## The interest for Islamic studies has increased – but not with everyone

The fact that the time for Islamic studies in *maktab* had been reduced possibly contributed to the increased interest in Islamic education. In any case, it could be one possible explanation according to this father, a nomad from Charbagh. He summarised:

People are more interested in Islamic education now. They are wiser if due to [*maktab*] education or due to Allah's blessings I don't know. Earlier only blind people memorised the Holy Quran, now there are many *Qaris*. When I was a child maybe only one out of a hundred children went to the mullah in the mosque; if so, it was a big event. Now every child goes to the mosque school.

The increased engagement in Islam and the revitalised concern for Islamic education may also be seen as a way to defy Western influences in general. Islam was a pillar of support for those who wished to resist consumerism and oppose the TV images, which were conceived as intrusive and against Islam. For others, the new phenomena were tempting. No one admitted weakened relations or limited performance of Islamic rituals personally, but some had witnessed a decreased engagement with Islam among their neighbours. A young teacher bitterly criticised the other villagers: "People's relation to Islam has started to decrease the last years. Now people are looser. They spend time on TV and video films, which is very destructive". A father in Charbagh with seven children shared his contempt: "Now every family has video and TV and they don't go to the mosque as often as before ... People are only running after dollars." A Charbagh mullah was frightened of what he called "the secularising facilities", a fear shared by a teacher in Sujani. The latter believed the "modern facilities [will cause] negative effects on morals in the future." They both found the government's disinterest in Islamic education proved their beliefs. A male teacher in Charbagh articulated the scepticism to the present development by referring to a poem by Rahman Baba<sup>210</sup>:

Earlier people were much more interested in Islam, now it is very little. Now people think that 12 years in school is too long so some parents send their sons to English courses instead in order to find employment with NGOs. Every one is running after money. Running for money and Islam cannot go together, it must be either/or.

Another father distinguished between theory and practice, and suggested: There are more people with Islamic education today, more *taliban* and more mullahs. There is more *ilm* (knowledge) but there is less *amal* (practise)." A few also distinguished between the older and younger generations. A 58-year-old father from Sujani and member of the *shura*, stated:

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<sup>210</sup> A famous Sufi poet: "Wealth and piety do not go together. I have not seen a wealthy man who is pious" (Translation Amir Mansory).

The older generation is getting closer to Islam. Old people adhere more to the rituals. They are stricter. But the younger generation has other interests. They want to watch TV and buy all kinds of things.

However, and unexpectedly, it is not possible to distinguish in the responses and statements a generational difference; those who discerned a weakened commitment to Islam among the other villagers were young as well as old. They were trained in *maktab* and/or in *madrasa* or they had not been to school at all. Generally, though, the interviewees considered most people to have become more committed to Islam due to the experiences of the last decades. “We will always be Muslims”, declared one mother in Charbagh.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Generally, the expanded access to *maktab* education was highly esteemed, although the appreciation was blended with worries that the expansion would lead to, indeed, had already led to, a declined quality in teaching and learning. The interest in Islamic education had increased and the awareness that the mosque also provided *education*, a local form of education, of equal importance and value seemed to be on the rise. For many, Islamic education seemed to be in danger and therefore required protection and defense.

Respondents also seemed vaguely aware that the Western type of education was changing the girls as they acquired a new identity as schoolgirls, a character most of their mothers had never had. So far the changes are visible only as slightly different clothes (for the worse) and a somewhat different behaviour (for the better) but what the changes would bring in future was unfathomable and possibly frightening.

The two villages did not differ in their opinions about the issues discussed in this chapter. The teachers in both villages considered the current school conditions as worse when compared with the time when they had been students. They found present day teachers to be less prepared, with worse training and that the students were less disciplined. Parents who had attended school in the 1960s and 1970s were generally more critical of the quality of today’s school than those who had been pupils later. The only difference was that parents in Charbagh complained less about poor organisation and weak teachers than Sujani parents. This was probably because Charbagh schools had SCA support, which meant not only regular salary payment to the teachers but also training, monitoring and control.



# Part Five

## Summary and Conclusion



Photo: Amir Mansory



## Chapter Sixteen

### An Afghan Dilemma

This chapter presents two Afghan folk theories. The first deals with the principle of *farz* in education and the second relates to globalisation. Several times in the present study, the concept of *farz* has been raised. The folk theory presented here explains what this principle entails in practice in relation to Islamic and Western type of education for boys and girls. During the fieldwork and increasingly during the analysis the respondents to some extent expressed different meanings of *farz* and it turned out that these different interpretations could be related to their somewhat different perceptions of Islam. The variations of these perceptions have been classified into four groups and this chapter starts with a presentation of these.

Had the villagers been influenced by globalisation? Had the ideas of late modernisation, as embedded in the phenomenon of globalisation, for example market ideology, consumerism, individualism, secularism and rationalism, in some way affected their thinking and behaviour? Were they aware that Islam is also part of globalisation processes? Could their defence of *madrassa* be an expression of the elsewhere common revitalisation of Islamic education?<sup>211</sup> In the previous chapters there are indications that globalisation was present in the lives of the villagers. However to further explore these indications and answer the above questions requires a yet another study. In lieu of this, to illuminate some of the aspects associated with globalisation, we posed questions associated with change. Basically, the questions circled around two themes, namely, how had the villagers conceived the occurred changes and what future changes did they anticipate? The set of questions associated with first theme resulted in a compilation of the respondents' reflections and explanations of their present lives in relation to the war period between the years 1979 – 2001. The outcome of the second thematic set of questions was an elaboration of the respondents' predictions regarding the future, from political, material, educational, religious, social and personal perspectives. These two parts constitute the foundation for the folk theory of globalisation that we have formulated.

Finally, this chapter summarises the dilemma, or rather dilemmas that the respondents experienced in relation to the choice between Islamic and Western type of education, to the principle of *farz* in education, to girls' participation in education and to the encounter between Islam and globalisation.

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<sup>211</sup> See Chapter 3 *Education and Knowledge in Islam*.

## Four perspectives

Differences between the two villages have been described earlier (see *Chapter 11 Two Afghan Villages*) but to recapitulate, Sujani had a more heterogeneous population compared to Charbagh and included several ethnic groups of substantive dimension but seemed more homogenous as regards distribution of wealth. In short, the Sujani population was poor and illiterate but appeared to be a relatively cohesive social unit. In Charbagh, people differed considerably as to their standards of living and educational background. People from other areas had moved in and some minority groups and nomads had settled but Pashtuns still dominated the population. Political experience and sympathies differed and tensions seemed to exist just beneath the surface. The two villages shared similar experiences of war and refugee existence and while an apprehensive atmosphere still lingered in and around both villages, in general, the situation was more strained and distrustful in Charbagh. In spite of these differences, the opinions, ideas and beliefs expressed by the parents, students, teachers, mullahs and elders, were remarkably alike in the two villages. All the villagers shared the basic foundation of Islam, and frequently their responses and reflections had Islamic points of departure, or what they considered to be Islamic starting-points. When different opinions *were* articulated, for example, regarding the meaning and goal of education, girls' participation or changes in the society, they were expressed by people in both Sujani and Charbagh. Their divergent views could sometimes be traced to their varied experience of a world outside the village, to their different experience of education or, but not least, to their (slightly) different perceptions of Islam. We found it necessary to uncover these latter perceptions when we set out to formulate a folk theory on *farz* in education. It turned out that it was impossible to formulate *one* theory. We found the complexity and richness embedded in people's beliefs resulted in different theories. The differences are small in all aspects; the theories differ only slightly, and the differences in the perception of Islam are even less conspicuous. However, uncovering the variations allows for a display of different understandings of the *farz* principle. We have distinguished four different groups with representatives in both villages, though some groups have more supporters than others in Sujani and others have more followers in Charbagh.

One group can be called "traditional" Muslims and includes those who hold long-established, time-honoured values, particularly common in rural settings, in communities with little or no contact with others. The "Traditionalists" in Sujani and Charbagh were well familiar with the basics of Islam and they considered this elementary knowledge sufficient for their needs. They could not always distinguish an Afghan value from an Islamic one and often, they thought of them as identical. Their faith was earnest and sincere but also pragmatic. They were fairly tolerant towards others' religions (to the extent they had experiences of other creeds). They seemed confident and trusting, somehow innocent, in their worldviews. Family members, including in-laws, cousins

and others in the extended family provided a strong social network, which, together with the relationships with other villagers, created strong cohesive bonds as well as intense social control. “*What will people say*”, seemed to be their core framework for action, especially, but not only, for women. “Traditionalists” were mostly illiterate but had experienced education in the mosque school and sometimes, if male, a few years of primary school. Education and educated people were held in very high esteem and an educated man was deeply respected and expected to act as a model and advisor for others. As regards girls’ education, they were generally positive but considered primary school, six years at the most, to be sufficient. Ideally, boys and girls would be taught in separate classes from the start, but from grade three or possibly four girls had to be taught by female teachers. Boys might benefit from studying longer, in *maktab* as well as in *madrasa* but the mosque school was enough for girls. The majority of this group lived in Sujani, but for all members of this group their families had usually lived in the same village (Sujani or Charbagh) for generations.

Another group, named by us as the “fundamentalist” Muslims, were few in number in both villages. They had a strict, even rigid understanding of Islam and equalised Islam with the Quran, literally, and did not see any need for interpretation. Nor did they know, or chose not to know, that Muslims hold various understandings of Islam in other parts of the world. They did not acknowledge that Islam had undergone changes since its beginnings in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The “Fundamentalists” strongly opposed every type of change, not only any associated with interpretation of Islam and the Quran but also with the Afghan way of life in general. They had often (like many from the other groups) participated in *Jihad* but were currently more disillusioned than other former *Mujaheddin*. They regarded the present developments with deep scepticism, and maybe agony and fear too. They clearly favoured Islamic education over a Western type of education. Indeed, some of them did not see any use for *maktab* education at all, particularly not for girls. *Maktabees* were looked upon with great suspicion. The “Fundamentalists” had often spent many years in *madrasas*, or were students or teachers in *madrasas* at the time of interview. Some of them had previously been supporters of the *Taliban* movement.

A third group, the “Islamists” had studied in both the *madrasa* and *maktab*, often simultaneously and for similar amount of time. Several had graduated from secondary education. They had quite another view of Islam, a more interpretative view. They were also ‘modernists’ in the sense that they wanted and hoped for a modern transformation of the society, a modernisation that they regarded as necessary and fully compatible with Islam. Indeed, they considered Islam to be well-matched and in harmony with modern development. They valued *maktab* education very much and regarded Islamic education likewise indispensable. Their expectations of education as a means to lead the country to peace and prosperity were huge. “Islamists” were interested in politics and followed political events inside as well as outside Afghanistan. They were dubious about the current situation in the country, not knowing for sure in which direction things would



develop. In general, most of them were more pessimistic than optimistic, though. They had adopted a wait-and-see policy along with keeping a low profile until the situation got clearer. There were more Islamists in Charbagh than in Sujani, possibly due to the higher educational level there. They were definitely positive to girls' participation in education, in *madrasa* as well as in *maktab*, and accepted male teachers for the first years, sometimes up to grade six. Co-education was tolerated in grades 1 - 3.

Finally, the smallest, but maybe a growing group, we called the "Secularists". They had not openly abandoned Islam. They did not explicitly express ideas such as the need for separating Islam from politics, or the necessity to distinguish personal moral from religion. Nor did they openly say that religion is a 'personal' or 'private' matter. Evidently, they looked forward to a new, modern life with comforts, maybe in a city, preferably a life not so close to their family and its control. They were primarily interested in *maktab* education. Education represented a ladder to upward mobility and to well paid salary jobs, preferably into positions that entailed the execution of power over others. They had nothing against the mosque school for a year or so for girls as well as for boys but did not consider additional Islamic education of much value. Co-education in the first grades was regarded as acceptable, and for girls a female teacher was not required before grade four, possibly not until grade six.

The four groups described above consist mainly, or only, of adult men. First, we had more restricted access to women and women's ideas and so to assign a group affiliation to the village women was therefore more difficult. If they adhered to any of these "blocs" we would likely find them among the "Traditionalists" and the "Secularists". Never did we hear any woman express ideas similar to those of the "Fundamentalists", likely because of their opposition to education for girls, which the interviewed women greatly favoured. Only rarely did they share the "Islamist" ideas, at least not in a conscious way, maybe because they were not aware of the "Islamist" ideas and besides, they had generally, very little information about contemporary politics.

These groups are ideal types in the Weberian sense and there are no clear-cut boundaries between the described groups. They overlap each other and a "Traditionalist" may sometimes share the same opinion as an "Islamist" on a certain topic and even a "Secularist" may have a similar idea as a "Fundamentalist". The descriptions take only a core of their identities into consideration and were constructed with the sole intention to clarify differences regarding the presented folk theories below.

## Two folk theories

Referring to *Chapter 7 Folk Models - Folk Theories*, the following is based on the respondents' views, ideas and beliefs as articulated or enacted, and then formulated by us into folk theories. Our endeavour has been to provide a version of their explanations

as accurately and justly as possible without interference or inclusion of our own interpretations. Instead, we provide a short comment after the presentation of each theory.

First is an account of a folk theory of *farz* in education, formulated as we believe the villagers would have, taking the different points of departure of the four groups identified above. *Farz*, a noun as well as an adjective, is usually translated as ‘obligation’ and ‘compulsion’ or ‘obligatory’ and ‘compulsory’. The term is closely related to ‘responsibility’ and ‘duty’, and these two kindred meanings, obligation and responsibility, were used interchangeably by the respondents. Sometimes *farz* implied a responsibility, to send children to school for instance, and on other occasions *farz* could mean an obligation, for a student to study, for instance.

Second, a folk theory on globalisation is formulated. Globalisation, as far as we understood, was a concept never used by the respondents. It is uncertain whether they had ever heard about the phenomenon at all, but they were somehow aware of some of the globalisation processes and effects. The theory is sometimes exemplified in statements made by different respondents. People held different, sometimes even contrasting standpoints on this issue as well. Although Sujani and Charbagh are located as far as can be at the periphery, far from advanced technologies and consumer brands, influences from the ‘core’ (Wallerstein, 1976) also took shape there, and were understood by the villagers as global influences. This consciousness may seem astonishing considering the isolated life the remote village conditions offer with few outside contacts, practically no media news, quite a few superstitious practices, tight bonds between family members and strong shields against outsiders. On the other hand, they had experienced different contexts and conditions. They had survived a war, caused by a foreign invasion and which led to a long occupation by a superpower. The resistance against the Soviet occupation, then one of the mightiest nations of the world, placed Afghanistan, and thereby villages like Sujani and Charbagh, on the map. The Afghan *Mujaheddin* were for a time, top news of the world. Moreover, the broader contacts achieved during the refugee life, predominantly for the men though, had certainly contributed to this global awareness also. Living and working in other surroundings had brought new insights. So, all in all, Sujani and Charbagh were not that isolated, they were and are villages on the globe.

### A folk theory of *farz* in education

*Farz* in education implies for the individual as well as for the collective two things, obligation and responsibility, two nearby concepts, which need to be distinguished from each other. When *farz* is imposed from outside, it is understood as obligation, and the person is compelled to do something by an external somebody or something. When *farz* is understood as responsibility, on the other hand, an inner drive makes the

person act, it is an internalised action. To submit to Allah implies fulfilment of the obligation that is bestowed upon the person, and that obligation is (or should ideally be) transformed into a responsibility.

Submission entails a person acting in accordance with Allah's will and knowledge is necessary in order to understand Allah's will. Therefore to study Islam is *farz*, which means that Islamic studies are compulsory. It is an obligation required by Allah. Mosque schools and *madrasas* are institutions where Islamic knowledge can be acquired but such knowledge can also be gained through personal studies. *Maktab* education is also *farz* from a religious perspective even though it exists due to outside influences, like the government, or indistinct entities such as the constitution or concepts like 'development' or 'modernisation'. Somehow, *maktab* education is *farz* from a religious perspective too. It is also according to Allah. As responsibility, *farz* implies a moral duty for the Muslim person, individual, parent and community member, to seek knowledge, to get an education, to ensure that sons and daughters are educated and to prepare the ground for educational facilities in the community so that all children have access to education.

Figure 16.1 provides the general model of *farz* in education. Emanating from the divine and the worldly orders it obliges all Muslims to seek knowledge. Individuals, parents and community members have the responsibility to ensure religious as well as non-religious education for themselves, for their children and for all the children in the village. However, the four perspectives of Islam and their "representatives" identified previously interpret *farz* in education differently in terms of meaning and implications for the general model. They differed concerning participation in *madrasa* and *maktab*. They also held different ideas concerning the implication of the *farz* principle for boys and girls. These varied perspectives are summarised in Table 16.1

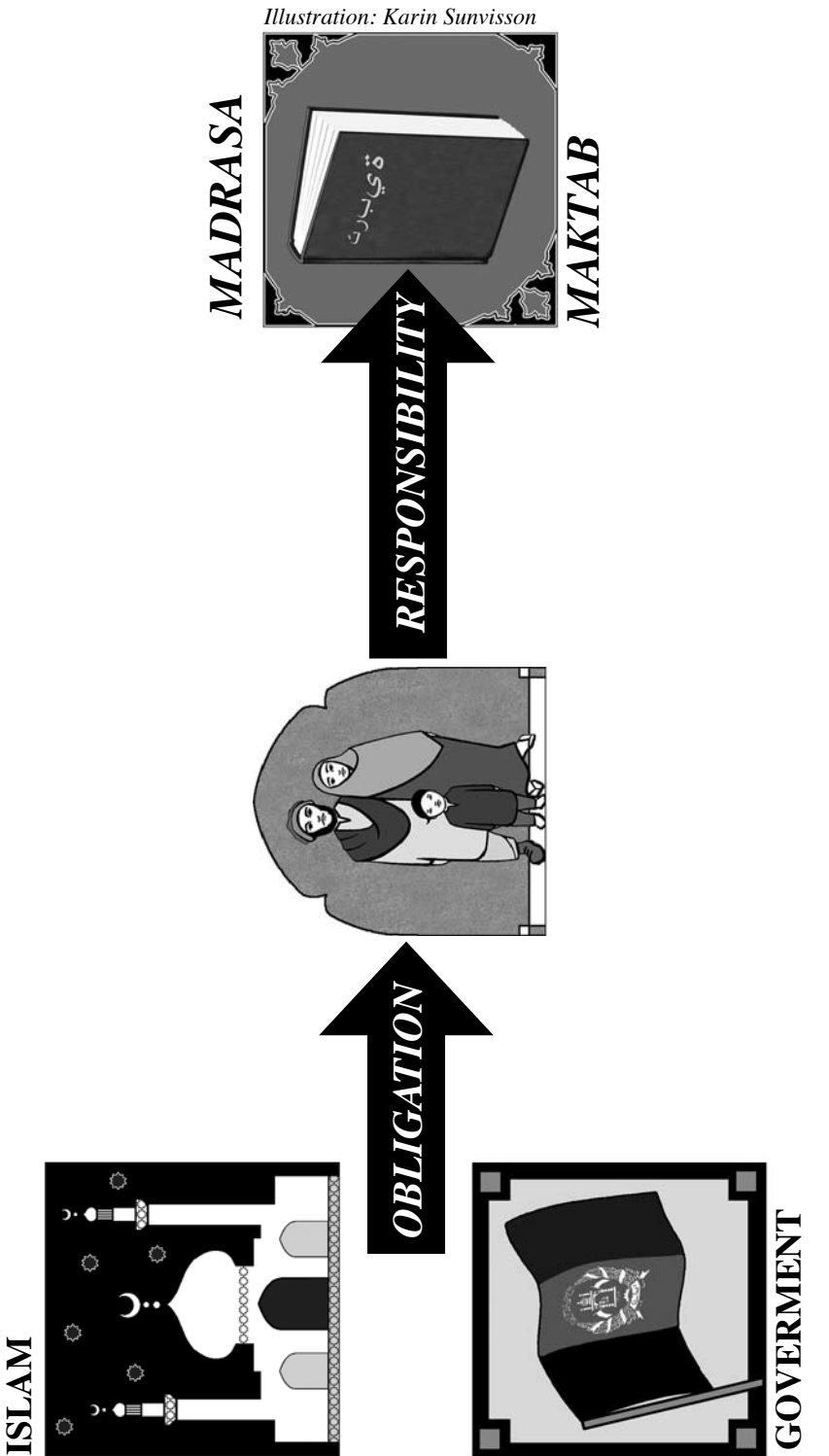


Illustration: Karin Sunvisson

Figure 16.1: *Farz* in education

Table 16.1: *Farz* in education as regards *maktab* and *madrassa*

	<i>Farz</i> as Obligation		<i>Farz</i> as Responsibility	
	Islamic education	Western type of education	Islamic education	Western type of education
“Traditionalists”	The basics (the content of the mosque school) are compulsory for all – boys as well as girls.	Compulsory, provided it is “useful” that is, corresponds to the needs (which are guided by gender roles) of the individual, the family and the community.	As individual: lifelong learning As father: send children to mosque school; teach children and family members at home. As male community member: provide support to mosque school and <i>madrassa</i> .	As parent: send children to <i>maktab</i> , boys first and boys more – but also girls if all conditions (short distance, female teacher, separate place) are in place.
”Fundamentalists”	Only the basics are compulsory for girls but boys need to study more.	<i>Maktab</i> is no obligation in its present form, neither for boys nor for girls.	As individual: lifelong learning As father: send children to mosque school (sons to <i>madrassa</i> ); teach family members, especially women and girls, at home. As community member: provide support to mosque school and <i>madrassa</i> ; control that community members follow Islam.	As father: allow only boys to <i>maktab</i> .  As community member: struggle to change <i>maktab</i> into <i>madrassa</i> .

<p>”Islamists”</p>	<p>The basics are compulsory for both boys and girls; curriculum in mosque school needs expansion.</p>	<p>Compulsory for both boys and girls.</p>	<p>As individual: lifelong learning As parents (mother and father): family teaching. As male community member: provide support to mosque school and <i>madrassa</i>; advocate for integration of the two types of education.</p>	<p>As individual: advocate for <i>maktab</i> for all children. As parents: send boys and girls to <i>maktab</i> – female teachers are preferred for girls. As community member: advocate for integration of <i>maktab</i> and <i>madrassa</i>.</p>
<p>”Secularists”</p>	<p>The basics are compulsory for boys and girls.</p>	<p>Compulsory for both boys and girls.</p>	<p>As parents (mother and father): allow children to mosque school.</p>	<p>As parents: send boys and girls to <i>maktab</i>, female teachers preferred for girls.</p>

The “Traditionalists” did not see *maktab* and *madrasa* as conflicting systems and although Islamic education entails a stronger compulsion, a Western type of education was seen as very good too. *Maktab* was good since it teaches *adab* and *akhlaq* and also about Islam, indeed, *maktab* can be considered as part of Islamic life. Considering the possibility for a better future for the whole family that might result if sons attend *maktab*, a Western type of education is virtually compulsory too. Since outcomes such as salaried jobs cannot be expected for girls, *maktab* cannot be considered obligatory for them. With regards to Islamic education, teaching in the mosque school is sufficient but it is credible for boys to continue above the elementary level. It would be laudable if girls did too but it is impossible since no girl has ever done so, and besides, *what would people say?* The government should provide *maktab* education and it should be free, while the community should be responsible for the *madrasa*.

For the “Fundamentalists” man should act as *khalifa* (vicegerent) on the earth. This is the most important task in life. To be able to perform all duties and responsibilities connected to this role, every man is obliged to learn as much as possible about Islam. He should also teach others and if possible, control that others live in accordance to Islam. Therefore, the *madrasa* is compulsory but *maktab* is not, particularly since the present form teaches far too little about Islam. As such *maktab* is not part of Islamic life, it is seen as education imposed by Westerners. However, it might be necessary to allow sons to attend the *maktab* so as to become at least a “clever *ami*”<sup>212</sup>. For girls there is no reason whatsoever to attend *maktab* since girls will remain inside the home as housewives and mothers.

The “Islamist” group considered Islamic and Western type of education of equal importance and both types as obligatory. However, the “Islamists” were not satisfied, and considered the present forms of Islamic education as outdated and *maktab* to be too conforming to Western ideals. The mosque school would preferably develop into a preparatory school for children aged 5 - 7 years with a pedagogy adapted to this age level. “Islamists” want the “primary” curriculum of the *madrasa* to be integrated into *maktab* education and more advanced Islamic studies to be studied at separate secondary or tertiary institutions. To accept male teachers also for older girls might be negotiable since *maktab* education is ‘compulsory’ for both boys and girls and considering the shortage of female teachers.

For the “Secularists” education is compulsory but is not a very strong obligation and Islamic education could be limited to the mosque school. This group believed that it is up to others to care for the *madrasa* and that it is voluntarily to attend. *Maktab* is seen as the only alternative after leaving the mosque school. “Secularists” are not interested in a merge of *madrasa* and *maktab* because they believe that teaching about Islam does not belong in *maktab* curriculum at all. They shared the opinion of the

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<sup>212</sup> The Prophet referred to himself as *ami*, as an illiterate person. In Afghanistan today the term refers to a person who is illiterate in Islamic issues, who has no education in Islamic matters or who has no education in general.

“Islamists” concerning male teachers for girls, in that under certain circumstances it might be acceptable (reluctantly) as a temporary solution to allow men as teachers in girls’ classes.

## Comments

All groups agreed that *farz* implies an obligation to seek knowledge, to get an education, and that this principle is applicable to all, girls and boys, women and men. There was, however, a certain disagreement as to which type of education was most important, or rather, the degree of importance attached to the respective educational systems. The discord also extended to the length of time spent in the two types of schools, particularly in relation to girls’ participation in education. All groups also agreed that *farz* implies responsibilities for one’s own learning, for children’s education and for education in the community. It is *farz* for parents to make education possible for their offspring, but again the differences between the groups were related to education in one or both systems, or rather, which system was most essential, and whether parental responsibility applied equally for sons and daughters. It is noteworthy that the community responsibility mainly referred to Islamic education, as the government was seen to hold the full responsibility for the provision of *maktab* education. Generally, all groups claimed that education is *farz* and beneficial for both boys and girls but the necessary segregated system made it impossible to establish equal opportunities. Although some could (at least in theory) accept male teachers as an interim solution, the impossibility to apply the principle of *farz* in education with regards to girls’ participation constituted for all groups, regardless of affiliation, a problem, a dilemma.

## A folk theory of globalisation

Village life before the wars and during the periods of peace followed a predictable cycle according to the agricultural seasons. Most of the villagers had never been outside the village border at that time. There was isolation, bad health and ignorance but also a simple, uncomplicated life, it was said that “people were more honest at that time”. The differentiation of wealth was marginal, in that poverty was widespread and equally shared, and experiences were likewise similar for all. There was a general feeling that all were alike and all had the same, which made it less difficult to endure the hardships of life. The belonging, which the shared, strong commitment to Islam entailed, was an asset that also reduced the sufferings, not least when, in addition to previous catastrophes, immense natural disasters, earthquakes and floods, hit Afghanistan at the end of the 1990s, and which partially affected Sujani and Charbagh.



No family has been able to shun the effects of the wars. Everyone has experienced the Soviet invasion and occupation, and all (except the youngest) have personal experience of the resistance war and subsequent internal conflicts. Virtually all families have lost one or more family members and many have experience of being injured or disabled. A few villagers have remained throughout but almost all had to leave their homes for longer or shorter periods; some were homeless for more than 20 years. Those who fled lived in different camps, inside or outside the country but everywhere camp life was miserable, especially for the women, whose freedom of mobility decreased even more. Many families lived in tents, especially during the first years before houses, schools and clinics were constructed. Many lived in extreme poverty, with food shortages, bad housing, illnesses and dying children. In displacement and exile, family bonds were stretched but mainly remained intact, but community cohesion suffered. Village institutions like the *shura* dissolved and were replaced by new organisations in the camps. All villagers supported the struggle of *Mujaheddin*, and a majority of the inhabitants supported the same faction. However, not everyone held the same sympathies and so to a small extent, the conflict between *Mujaheddin* groups divided the villagers, and could split a family too.

Returning to “normal” life again, has involved restoring neighbour relations, familiarising with newcomers, re-installing institutions, repairing and constructing houses, preparing the fields for sowing and harvesting, in short, starting anew. For many a new life has just begun. The relative peace is heartily praised. The new government represents a longed for stability, and the security, be it uncertain, is extremely cherished. However, no one feels completely safe and some are pessimistic seeing dark clouds in the sky. The ongoing US occupation too closely resembles the occupation of 25 years ago and the revived *Taliban* movement attracts supporters, a frightening sign for most people. However, political resistance is homeless and silenced, and there is a sense that the parliamentary elections were maybe just a farce. At village level, conflicts between bordering villages create tension and old, unsolved disagreements between families gall.

Nonetheless, as regards the future many respondents are very optimistic, “finally we have a government, we will get democracy and freedom”. Most people are hopeful and even the sceptics intensely try to sustain their hopes. Hopes are expressed for a just and fair government to rule the entire country, for the benefit of all the ethnic groups of Afghanistan. No more division, no more conflicts and no more violence: “No more disasters!” Other countries have come to help, too and it is hoped the future will bring development, modernisation and welfare, including better roads, electricity and other improvements. Overall, hygiene is improving and children get healthier and material standards have already risen. However, it is obvious that some have more than others, particularly families who receive remittances from relatives abroad.

There are many who are less confident though and worry about the political situation, thinking that maybe the present tranquillity is just a pause? The peace is

indeed fragile and will it really last? Pessimism prevails regarding future development: “There are so many foreigners here now and they may start influencing our religion in a bad way, which may cause upheavals and new problems again”. The development, modernisation and improving living standards may also be threats. Higher living standards and more comfort are indeed needed and longed for but there is a risk that all purchasing of goods and commodities and in the end a consumerist culture might take over the traditional values. “To run after money” is a behaviour that does not correspond to *adab* and *akhlaq*. It is feared too that the wealth will be unevenly distributed with a widening gap between poor and rich anticipated. The collective spirit might be replaced by individualisation. “There is no respect for good advice any longer. People don’t care about others, they do as they like. The honest man of the past has vanished and people have become much more complicated”. A notion of innocence, recalled from the old times, has already started to be substituted by calculation and manipulation, “earlier people didn’t know anything and didn’t demand anything but now everyone says ‘I want to have this and do bring me that’. Why has it become like this?”

On the one hand, commodification of social relations is approaching and on the other, it seems as if social control has tightened its grip. Some people favour looser social cohesion or at least, they are questioning the value of tight social control. ‘*What people will say*’ has somehow become more important than ever, maybe because it is no longer self-evident that every family and every individual share exactly the same norms.

Regarding education, though, practically everyone is grateful for its expansion. The reestablishment of the schools is the most positive sign of a new era and the most commonly appreciated. Boys and girls in education represent hopes and expectations of a better future, “I just hope that children will go to school more and more and that the schools improve. But I don’t know, only Allah knows the future”. Provided that the conditions are acceptable, more and more girls will go to school for longer and longer times. “In the coming five years, a new generation will be educated and we will have more and more people with education. We will get more female teachers and more girls in the schools”.

Through *madrassa* as well as *maktab* education, *adab* and *akhlaq* will improve, ignorance will decrease and the health status of the entire village will improve. Education has also brought improved *adab* and *akhlaq* among those who do not attend school. Still though, quite a few girls but also some boys do not go to school, and it is troubling that so many quit after only a few years. Boys and girls say they will leave the village (although many also want to stay with their parents) and go where jobs are available. To work as a doctor in a city “where the life is better” is the dream for many, knowing there are no jobs in the village.

Up until now at least, Islam was the glue that kept it all together, it represents a value system that everybody shares and relates to, and will be preserved, “we have

always been Muslims and we will always be”. The worst menace is the secularisation that modernisation is likely to bring and most people are alarmed by secularisation. Some see it as inevitable and will induce undesired morals, manners and values. People are afraid that Islam will lose its power, and that the faith will wane as a result of incoming modern commodities and habits. The signs of weakened interest are city phenomena but these are creeping closer to the village. Less Islam in *maktab*, less interest in Islamic education from the government as well as from the people and deteriorated Islamic conduct are evils the future might carry. An imam explains:

There will be English and computers in *maktab* and much less Islam. The government wants so separate Islam from *maktab*, they decrease all the time. So children in *maktab* will not even have basic knowledge about Islam, which is particularly important in our time, in this period of history it is extra important that children know about Islam so they can tackle the world culture. But unfortunately I think Islam will be separated.

Some people, teachers in particular, suggest a merger of the two educational systems believing it would be better for both schools if they were joined. Then the *madrasa* would become more institutionalised, organised with syllabus, programmes and plans, and there would be a salary for the mullahs; and *maktab* would get more Islamic subjects.

Others argue that whatever measures the government will take, the “Islamic practices at home will never change”. And others think that Islam will strengthen its hold on people and that the creed will be reinforced, “as a means to resist the non-Islamic tendencies”, and Islam represents a value system that everybody shares and relates to. Somehow Islam will be preserved, “we have always been Muslims and we will always be.” The signs of weakened interest are city phenomena – but are creeping close also to the village. Some people are uncertain whether Islamic values will remain with everybody when faced with modern ideas and foreign values. Others have confidence in Islam to withstand and resist. They do not fear the attacks on the religion, which they predict will come, believing that Islam will be defended, if necessary by violent means.

The older generation is more tranquil and trusts in Islam’s ability to survive, at least as a private, personal religion. Those with education expect and hope for a new, modern form of Islam, with mullahs who have *maktab* as well as *madrasa* education. They hope for an Afghan society guided by Islamic values, which will peacefully develop into a modern society in cooperation with other countries on the globe.

## Comments

The above account is summarised as common perceptions concerning present and future changes, or, in other words as a folk theory of globalisation and presented in Table

16.2. Those with expectations and those with apprehensions represent two extreme positions. In reality, most people embraced both views simultaneously on many issues. They wanted a fair political system in accordance with Islam but their experience so far had made them suspect that other interests were steering the development. They longed for modernisation and better living standards but feared a consequential depreciation of Islamic values. They wanted education for their children but worried about the decline of Islamic education. How to uphold Islam as a guide in life and as common value denominator in the encounter with modernisation, or globalisation, constituted their dilemma. People seemed to feel they were at a crossroad with one route leading to Islam and the other to modernisation. However, they did not want to choose one or the other, they wanted both.

**Table 16.2: Ongoing and future changes and tendencies related to the past as perceived by respondents in Sujani and Charbagh**

PAST	FUTURE	
	Expectations	Apprehensions
Invasion, occupation	Peace	Continued occupation
Resistance war	Security	Threat from local powers
Internal conflicts	Government	<i>Taliban</i> revival
	Stability	Instability
	Elections	Weak political opposition
	Democracy	Fake democracy
Extreme poverty	Improving life standards	Widening gaps
Simple life	Modernisation	Consumerism
Shared conditions	Development	Temptations A
	Aid for development	Aid may lead to dependency

PAST	FUTURE	
	Expectations	Apprehensions
Predictable cyclic life	Calm village life with modern facilities Children remain in village Social control relaxed	Complicated life City jobs Children move to cities Social cohesion dissolved
Refugee life: Family bonds intact Village community fragile	Village life: Intact social relations Returnees and newcomers live in peace Village institutions remain strong	Village or city life: Weakened family bonds Tensions between groups Alien organisations imposed
A few NGO <i>maktabs</i>	Quality education for all in <i>maktab</i> and <i>madrasa</i>	High drop outs Secularised education
Camp <i>madrasas</i>	Modern <i>madrasas</i> or joined systems	Marginalized <i>madrasas</i>
Strong commitment to Islam	Maintained strong commitment to Islam	Foreign influence leads to weakened interest for Islam
Islamic society attacked – enemy defeated	Islamic society in peace	Islamic society attacked, outcome uncertain
Honest, innocent people Collective spirit	Knowledgeable, honest people Collective spirit remains	Calculating people Individualism Commodification of relations Increased materialism
Sickness, ignorance	Hygiene, health improved <i>Adab</i> and <i>akhlaq</i> improved	Decreased moral standards
Women in seclusion	Girls and women in education	Women work in cities Lost honour and control

## The dilemmas

The formulated two folk theories, the first on *farz* in education, and the other on globalisation, both end with an open predicament, to which the villagers seem not to have found a solution at present. They are caught in a dilemma with several implications, or rather, they are stuck in several dilemmas.

The Islamic obligation and responsibility for every man and woman to seek knowledge, the principle of *farz* in education, is comparable with the UN declared universal right to education for every boy and girl. Education is a duty and a right and according to the Afghan constitution, nine years of (*maktab*) education is compulsory for all Afghan children. According to Islam, knowledge about Allah's will is necessary for life on earth as well as for the afterlife. Thus, the divine power as well as the worldly powers urge Afghan parents to send their children to school. Parents must allow all boys and girls to remain in school for a certain time so as to acquire the necessary knowledge and must not allow them to withdraw early.

*Farz* in education for both girls and boys does not constitute a problem or dilemma as long as basic education is concerned. Basic Islamic education as provided in the mosque school is accepted for both boys and girls, and is supported and appreciated by everyone. Basic education in *maktab* for girls as well as for boys is also encouraged and defended by practically everybody.

The predicament arises when girls approach adolescence, when they become "big", and then require, according to established customs, a segregated education. However, the obligation principle and the separation principle do not imply an inevitable collision *per se*, as there is nothing to hinder sex-segregated education at any age. The dilemma occurs due to the claim that a male teacher cannot teach girls above a certain age or maturity level as Sujani and Charbagh parents did, and as do most parents in (rural) Afghanistan. This claim *does* imply a clash of the two principles, since female teachers do not exist at the required numbers. The principle of obligation in education, which is (or should be) applicable for all, and the principle of separation in education, also applicable for all but with implications – negative implications – only for girls, collide. This clash results in a difficult-to-solve dilemma, and in reality it means that female teachers may never be available. When men are not accepted as teachers for adolescent girls in *maktab* education, girls cannot continue to secondary school. Often they cannot even continue to the upper grades of the primary cycle. Thus, there will be no women to train for the teaching profession.

It seems even more problematic for girls to get the same opportunities as boys regarding access to Islamic education. Female teachers are a prerequisite but at the same time, teachers in *madrasas* have always been men, mullahs, and a female mullah was hardly imaginable. Since male mullahs are not acceptable for older girls, girls will never get more than elementary education about Islam. As a result, no women will have the same training as mullahs, and will never be qualified to teach in the mosque

schools or in *madrasas*.

Thus, to insist on female teachers will inevitably result in girls being continuously excluded from Islamic as well as Western type education after attending the basic level. Women with two or three years of *maktab* education cannot be expected to teach girls above grade three in *maktab*, just as women with only basic training in the mosque school cannot be expected to train girls in *madrasas* about Islamic matters that they have not studied themselves.

As long as the separation principle is stronger than the obligation principle, it will continue to triumph over *farz* in *maktab* education. Continuing on into the future, only men will belong to the literate and educated strata in Afghanistan and women will continue to linger behind as illiterate or half literate. As long as the principle of separation supersedes the principle of obligation, women in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan will continue to possess Islamic knowledge to a much lower degree than their fathers, husbands, brothers and sons.

Reluctantly, vaguely, but increasingly, the villagers realised this quandary and many seemed to suffer from the dilemma it evoked and each tried to tackle it somewhat differently. Mostly, they opted for a shallow interpretation of the principle of *farz*, shallow in the sense that they choose to disregard the implications. They simply avoided thinking about it and hoped that life would go on as before. Practically all were not very concerned that girls only learn the rudiments of Islam and simply accepted the present state of affairs as unchangeable. Concerning *maktab* education, the issue was more complicated and not so easily ignored but still, some (the "Fundamentalists") frankly denied girls the right or duty to *maktab* education and in doing so rejected the Islamic principle of *farz*. The "Traditionalists" 'solved' the problem by deciding that girls only needed a basic education as they would marry as early as before. There were voices, though, in particular of mothers and students, who realised the problem and understood the long term effects of excluding girls from education. They were prepared to accept a male teacher at least as a temporary solution, until sufficient numbers of girls were trained and could work as teachers. The "Islamists" and the "Secularists" argued similarly, half-heartedly, agreeing to men as teachers for girls, though not as a permanent solution. They advocated for equal opportunities for boys and girls in education but they were not prepared for equality in work life and societal matters. They seemed not to have reflected on *why* girls should study as much as boys.

Another dilemma faced by the respondents has to do with the conflict between *madrasa* and *maktab*. All parents wanted an Islamic education for their children and all students were interested in acquiring knowledge about Islam. All respondents emphasised the necessity for everyone to know about Islamic matters and virtually all children attended the mosque school. However, there was a general consensus that the learning available in the mosque school and particularly in the *maktab* was too little. Parents wanted their children to get more than elementary knowledge but no one had opted for the traditional *madrasa* instead of the *maktab* and no family separated their

children so that some went to *maktab* and other to *madrasa*. In Sujani, the previously renowned *madrasa* was almost empty of students and in Charbagh, the *madrasa* had just recently reopened after having been closed for some years. Interestingly, the participating *Taliban* were also students of *maktab*.

This may all be interpreted as a weakened interest for Islamic education, however, practically all parents were extremely annoyed with the decreased hours of Islamic teaching in the *maktab*. Some argued for a *madrasa-maktab*, that is, a *madrasa* that included also the *maktab* subjects, and others claimed the solution to be a merger of *maktab* and *madrasa*, a *maktab* that includes the *madrasa* subjects. These demands represented yet another dilemma for the villagers. They wanted to have their cake and eat it too. This predicament also seems to be unsolvable; a complete merging of *madrasa* (the traditional form) and *maktab* would result in a very long education. Adding the two systems would imply going to school for more than 20 years! Needless to say, a too costly education, impossible for the individual as well as for government. No one seemed to argue for such a solution either. A combined education where the two types would have equal importance seemed impossible, or at least, it was an alternative already lost. Somehow, the respondents seemed to have given up on the traditional *madrasa*. Instead, they had accepted the triumph of the Western type of education, but they did not wish to surrender completely and the struggle for Islamic education continued.

The decline and marginalisation of Islamic education was understood to be a result of a general capitulation to Western ideas. However, modernisation of society was acknowledged as part of these Western ideas and improved living standards, Western type of education, health facilities and so forth were dearly yearned for. The intersection of the craving for the benefits a 'modern' life would bring and the desire for a pious life in shelter of Islam constitutes yet another dilemma, maybe overarching the other dilemmas. It was suspected that the precious modernities would not harmonise with Islamic values. No one wanted to reject their highly treasured religion in favour of a modern life. But neither did anyone want to remain in poverty. There was great uncertainty as to whether it would be possible to combine these two entities. The hopes and worries connected to already occurring changes or to changes perceived to come reveal strength as well as helplessness. On the one hand, Muslims are considered to have sufficient strength to resist the "evil" from outside so as to remain and maintain the faith in Islam. On the other hand, the Muslims are weak and will just accept the "good" coming from outside and will abandon Islam. No one seemed to count on the Islamic faith as a guiding force to modernisation and despite of their foreign experience and remarkable consciousness, the respondents were not (yet) aware that Islam is a strong factor in the globalisation processes.



## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The folk theory on *farz* in education implies an obligation as well as responsibility. *Maktab* as well as *madrasa* education is compulsory as a result of the Islamic principle and compels every Muslim to take the responsibility to seek knowledge and to facilitate education for children. This general principle is interpreted differently depending on perspectives held by “Traditionalists”, “Fundamentalists”, “Islamists” and “Secularists”, respectively. The disagreements refer to the importance attached to *madrasa* and *maktab* and to girls’ participation in education. Segregated education is required but since the shortage of female teachers and mullahs excludes girls from continuing education above the basic level in *madrasa* as well as in *maktab*, the principle of *farz* constitutes a dilemma. As long as the segregation principle is allowed to overrun the principle of *farz*, girls and women will remain illiterate or half literate, with limited knowledge of religious matters. The conclusion to draw is that the Islamic principle of *farz* in education does not apply on Afghan girls.

According to the constitution nine years of *maktab* education is compulsory for every Afghan child. For the same reason as above girls participate only a few years in *maktab*. The conclusion to draw is that the constitution is not upheld for Afghan girls.

The respondents faced another dilemma too; the desire for Islamic education and the equally strong demand for a Western type of education presented two perspectives not easy to combine. A blend of the two systems seemed impossible, and in reality, the traditional *madrasa* was no longer an option to *maktab*. However, the demand for Islamic education in the mosque school as well as in *maktab* was strong.

The third overarching dilemma refers to the clash between Islamic values and modernisation. The villagers had most likely never heard about the concept of globalisation but were still remarkably aware of its existence, at least parts of it. They feared that the better life they longed for with reduced poverty, improved health and nutrition standards and not least, educational facilities would also bring secularisation, individualism and consumerism, and in the end a weakened Islamic identity.

# Chapter Seventeen

## Summary and Conclusion

In this, the final chapter of the study, the aims and objectives will be restated and discussed in the light of the findings. The five parts of the study will be summarised and main conclusions provided. The overall aims of this study are to describe children's participation, in particular that of girls, in the two educational systems and to explore some of the effects of globalisation processes on education. We wanted to know the perceptions of 'ordinary people' on issues related to their goals, expectations and perceived meaning of education, and the relationships between Islamic and Western type of education, and finally, how gender roles and relations in Afghan society have affected their perceptions, particularly with regards to girls' participation in education. We were well aware that girls' participation in education is a new phenomenon in many parts of the country, particularly in rural areas and the very idea that girls can also go to school has only recently surfaced for many people. We were curious to know how mothers and fathers, teachers and mullahs and not least the students themselves reasoned around this novelty. The Sujani girl school represents such a fresh experience and Charbagh village accommodates one of the oldest girl schools in Afghanistan, even though it had been closed for long periods in the 1980s and 1990s. A comparison between the experiences in these two villages seemed interesting.

Afghanistan was at the time of the field studies (in 2004) in a very fragile state of affairs<sup>213</sup>. The prospects for reconstruction after the many years of war were promising but uncertain. After decades of isolation, Afghanistan was suddenly invaded by military, economic and cultural powers, the "carriers of globalisation" (Stromquist, 2002). Abruptly, centuries old traditions and life patterns are being confronted with modern technologies, Western lifestyles and the growth of a new, rich elite. Aid has arrived to Afghanistan. How did rural people regard the changes, and what did they think about the future in this extraordinary situation between hope and despair? We wanted to know whether and in that case how globalisation processes were perceived at the micro level, by villagers.

The focus throughout the study has been on the perceptions held by the interviewees in the two villages, as articulated in their responses and demonstrated through their actions. The first objective of the study refers to what motives parents had for sending their sons and daughters to school, or expressed differently, what meaning they attached to education. To meet such an objective, it was necessary to distinguish between the two types of schools, the *madrassa* and the *maktab*, and in addition, to separate the motives for sons' and daughters' participation in education. It is well known that gender parity in education is not common in Afghanistan. Less known is the

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<sup>213</sup> Sadly, the security situation has further deteriorated since then.

fact that girls are excluded, to a high degree, from Islamic education also. The second objective of the study is to illuminate some aspects that influence girls' participation in the two educational systems, in particular the perspectives of those who are most concerned; the students, the parents, the teachers and the mullahs. Girls' education has during its short existence, experienced several backlashes. Whether these and other historical events have influenced the present state of educational affairs constitutes one part of the third objective. The second part refers to globalisation processes in Afghanistan. Globalisation in education generally entails features of decentralisation, privatisation and freedom of choice. Commonly, a market ideology penetrates the aims of education, the state role, financing, curriculum, teaching methods, teacher-training, and so forth. Afghanistan has only been on the global arena for a few years, but had these phenomena already reached the country?

The research has applied a case study approach including two villages in rural Afghanistan. The concept of 'folk model' or, as we prefer, 'folk theory' has proven valuable for this study. The suggestions brought up in particular by Horton (1993) were especially useful. His explanations of the tenets of common sense, the difference between theoretical principles in traditional and scientifically oriented cultures, and the implications of context-bound thinking were valuable when we tried to understand the meaning people attached to social phenomena, and when we later formulated the Afghan folk theories. Our attempt has been to formulate theoretical explanations of two phenomena, one about *farz* in education and another of globalisation, as if they had been written by the villagers themselves. Both folk theories concluded in dilemmas.

The findings are discussed in relation to concepts of education, gender and globalisation. Education in Islam, *tarbiya*, is understood as a lifelong process for each individual Muslim. It entails "reform, development, and empowerment" ([www.masboston.org/index.php?section=14](http://www.masboston.org/index.php?section=14)). The long history and the fact that the structure and curriculum have remained practically unchanged in large parts of the Muslim world are assets (the entire *umma* learn the same) as well as complications (the difficult-to-apply principle of unity between reason and faith) for contemporary Islamic education.

Rational thought and spiritual knowledge may be hard to unite but the idea of human reality as a social construction (Berger & Luckman, 1967) indicates that knowledge and reality differ according to social context be it Islamic or Western. Some educational theories in Western thought such as functionalist and utilitarian approaches are still valid and can be applied to the educational situation in Afghanistan. For the respondents, the knowledge to acquire in the two educational systems is different but both types of schools, both types of knowledge, were considered necessary.

Practically all children attended the mosque schools to learn about Islam and Islamic values, practice Islamic rituals and achieve some basic literacy and numeracy. However, these activities are not currently acknowledged as educational by the authorities and the Ministry of Education does not exert any responsibility or

supervision. Children are taught by mullahs, *taliban* or imams, none of whom have attended or been offered teacher training. The textbooks are not at children's level and have not changed for centuries. However, some of the traditional learning techniques are, on the other hand, amazingly up to date. Memorisation is considered both an art and a useful technique for learning, which does not exclude understanding.

Traditional *madrasas*, which historically were the only form of education and which, during the major part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century constituted an alternative to *maktab* seem to be on the decline. The village *madrasas* had variously closed, were marginalised, or had recently reopened with a few students (who simultaneously studied in the *maktab*). The village children (and probably Afghan children in other parts of the country) had less access to Islamic education than their parents had, at least less than their fathers. There were many complaints about the reduction of hours about Islam in *maktab*. One response had been to have more *dar-ul-hefaz* and Quran schools for girls.

Thus, there are two simultaneous trends: on the one hand, a decline of traditional *madrasas* and on the other, a revival of Islamic education. Many of the young imams and mullahs are trained in Pakistan and have received both *madrasa* and *maktab* education. They represent another type of *taliban* than those who have become notorious all over the world (and who are villainous in the eyes of most Afghans also). Another tendency in Islamic education is the new initiative by the government to control the *madrasa* education.

The previous parallel educational systems have developed into complementary systems although a continuing decline of traditional *madrasas* must not be taken as certain. With shrinking job opportunities for *maktab* students, traditional village *madrasas* or perhaps revitalised community *madrasas* may again present an alternative for boys, and maybe girls too. Muslims in other parts of the world have made use of modern technologies like the Internet to spread Islam and as an instrument for Islamic education. Using such modern tools to maintain Islam may soon be in the reach of villages like Sujani and Charbagh considering the ongoing expansion of electricity. Another possible development, favoured by some of the respondents, is a merger or fusion of the two systems into an *Islamic maktab*. A third option is the complementary alternative, a hybridisation, in which Islamic education is a voluntary supplement, provided as a before or after school activity.

The meaning the respondents attached to education was related to expected material, economic and social gains but also, and not least, to spiritual and moral returns. The social returns expected from participating in Islamic education are primarily associated with promoting a Muslim identity, an identity that surpasses ethnic boundaries, even Afghan nationality, and places the Afghan in the context of *umma*. Social returns of *maktab* education are associated with the contributions to development of society made by a *maktab* educated doctor, engineer or teacher. Spiritually, the praying rituals, for example, taught and practiced in the *madrasa* provide returns for the individual in the form of intrinsic feelings and a sense of being in contact with

Allah. Moral returns were expected from both systems alike. In essence, learning *adab* and *akhlaq*, the important guides for human behaviour, were regarded as the main goal of both types of education.

Practically all students, boys as well as girls, planned for university studies and almost all parents had similar aspirations, at least for their sons. Hardly anyone was aware that access to higher education is extremely limited or that the job market is very small for university graduates. The trust the respondents placed on education as the solution to many of their present problems runs the risk of being replaced by disappointment.

Education of boys was seen as an investment in the future. Great expectations were attached to boys' future earnings and to the status and positions that would follow with a salaried job. To get *khair* (Allah's blessing) was important too. The cost parents might pay for a boy's education is substantial given that *maktab* education (including university studies) equates to many years of lost earnings the boy might have brought from working for others, or in generating family income. On the other hand, the education of girls carries only small costs since girls' indoor activities contribute less than boys' outside activities do to the family economy. By many parents, education of girls was viewed as no investment, or even considered a bad investment. In the few cases when it was expected that the girl (as an adult) would contribute a salary to the family economy, it would be to her husband's family. Educating girls has been likened to "watering a neighbour's garden" (Singh, cited in Eloundou-Eneyegue & Calves, 2006).

No one in the villages opposed girls' participation in *maktab* as such but some found that more than three to four years in school collided with the time needed to prepare for marriage. The marriage issue reflects the view that traditional gender roles must be maintained. The respondents often said, "the man is for outside and the woman is for inside", that is, the man is the public person of the family, the official head. If men and women both worked 'outside', the man would not be the main/sole family provider. Charity work, such as that of teacher or doctor is acceptable since it does not jeopardise the traditional gender roles.

Thus, girls' education was, at least for the time being, accepted. No one questioned girls' participation in education but all set conditions for participation, and some imposed a maximum length. What are the future prospects?

To discuss such a question, it may be constructive to first look back. The three decades of development from 1950 to 1980 included a large expansion of education. Not only in the cities but also in many rural areas, including remote villages, schools were set up and teaching initiated. However, girls' schools were seldom planned outside urban settings. When Amir recalls this period he does not believe that education for girls crossed anyone's mind at that time. The government did not as today put pressure on communities to create opportunities for girls. It was not until the 1980s while the war was raging that girl schools popped up here and there, usually on the initiative

of the *Mujaheddin* and with support from NGOs. The schools in the refugee camps, supported by the *Mujaheddin* parties, NGOs or UN agencies such as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) often provided education for girls. It happened that local communities, particularly with refugee returnees, started girls' schools on their own too<sup>214</sup>.

This experience, although shared by a minority of Afghan villages, paved the way for the present acceptance of girls' enrolment. The time now seems mature for the government's current endeavour, supported by the international community. The obstacles that were brought up and which in particular impede girls from continuation after some primary years were bad security, long walking distances, lack of separate classrooms, too little teaching about Islam, and in particular the shortage of female teachers. However, as shown by the Charbagh girl school, availability of female teachers does not seem to be sufficient to maintain enrolment; the girls quit after a few years anyway. The total number of girls and boys in their respective primary schools in Charbagh was almost identical in the lower grades but by grades five and six there were twice as many boys as girls enrolled.

Who were the parents of those girls who continued or who were allowed to continue? Mothers were generally more in favour of a long education for girls than fathers. Whether the father had been a student in *maktab* or not did not seem to matter. Fathers with a completed secondary education were no more positive toward girls' schools than illiterate fathers. However, the illiterate mothers we interviewed were more supportive than those with a *maktab* education. The few parents with education and higher socioeconomic status were more positive to a long education for girls.

Although 'globalisation' was a never heard of concept, villagers know some of its features, e.g. secularisation, individualism and consumerism, and fear these may lead to a weakened Islamic identity. The folk theory on globalisation concluded with the respondents trapped in a corner or faced with a dilemma. A better life, healthier, wealthier and above all, in peace was dearly craved. *Maktab* education was seen as the most visible and easiest to understand path that would bring a more prosperous living. The risk was, however, that 'modern' life would harm the collectively valued faith in Islam. Was it possible that money and Islam could go together?

The last chapter of this study presents this and other dilemmas. The first dilemma refers to the encounter between Islam and globalisation. Another is associated with the choice between an Islamic and a Western type of education and a third is related to the principle of *farz*, particularly as it applies to girls' participation in education.

The rights perspective in education, included in the global drive for education

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<sup>214</sup> This also happened during the Taliban time. Pia once in 1998 accidentally found a girl school in a remote village in eastern Afghanistan that was unsupported except by the parents. The school's headmaster and the one who had initiated the school was a "member" of the Taliban movement and had studied for six or seven years in a Pakistani madrasa. He stated that he considered the Taliban ban on girls' education as being "unislamic".

for all, coincides to a high degree with the Islamic principle of *farz* in education. This principle, originally valid only for boys, has come to include also girls – an example of ‘glocalisation’ with significant consequences for girls’ participation in education.

*Farz*, with its two closely related meanings, ‘obligation’ and ‘responsibility’, was understood differently by different groups, was applied differently to *madrassa* and *maktab* and got a specific meaning when related to girl’s participation. In general and regardless of perspective (with the exception of a minority ‘fundamentalist’ position) education was considered *farz* and beneficial for both boys and girls. However, the equally strong principle of separated education required girls to be taught by female teachers. Due to the shortage of female teachers, the dilemma emerged. The quandary was currently solved by the victory of the segregation principle, meaning that girls could not go to or could not continue in school above a certain age. As such, *farz* was not applicable to the Afghan girls living in the studied villages. Neither was the constitution upheld, which denotes the right to education to boys and girls alike. However, this solution was by no means considered acceptable and resulted in a difficult to solve dilemma, which lives on.

When evaluating the responses and in particular when analysing the arguments for and against girls’ education, Horton’s (1993) concept of the ‘closed predicament’ of traditional thought came into our minds. Traditionally, education has been considered only for males and from the arrival of Islam to Afghanistan women have been excluded from instruction in the mosque. When Western type of education was introduced, hardly anyone thought of involving the girls and up to 1950, the number of schoolgirls could be counted in the hundreds. When girl schools started to penetrate rural villages, at first slowly and now at an increasingly rapid speed, the closed predicament that ruled out girls in education has steadily been weakening. However, a practically unanimously opinion among the respondents was that the *traditional* education, the *madrassa* education must be for ever reserved for boys.

It was acknowledged that society needs girls and women with education, but these needs were restricted to areas such as teaching and medical care. It should be kept in mind, though, that the options for boys’ careers are also few. Potential jobs for male *maktabees* are mainly the same as for women, that is, teaching or medicine although boys may also aspire to occupations such as office workers and engineers. Interestingly, no one mentioned the work opportunities available for boys in the army or the police. There were indications that the interviewees perceived that ‘development’ and ‘modernisation’ somehow would require people with *maktab* education for professions other than those mentioned as well. ‘Modern’ professions require *maktab* education but for engagement in societal matters and for participation in community affairs a *madrassa* education gives a *maktabee* an additional strength or power. That the village *shuras* included not only respected elders but also young men with *maktab* education is a sign of this new adaptation. Taking responsibility for collective needs in a wider context were still considered entirely men’s business. Including female *maktabees* in



such activities was unimaginable. Women's continued exclusion from more advanced Islamic education is a way to bar female participation in societal or "out-of-house" activities except in the teaching and health care fields.

What seems to be the real obstacle are the gender roles that are so strictly applied in Afghan society and apply to all spheres of life. Education of girls had no meaning for parents who aspired to marriage alone for their daughters. In this frame, a girl becomes a wife, joins another family and has children. Her parents cannot expect any return from sending her to school except possibly less trouble to find a husband and the *khair* it will imply. More than three or four years of primary school are not necessary.

However, things are changing. It is accepted that women can be teachers and doctors and Islamic education is opening up for girls. The Education For All Declaration, an external expression of globalisation in education, has encountered the principle of *farz* in education, an inherent power of Islamic value. This meeting has caused a revision of the *farz* principle to make it applicable to females. A 'glocalised' version has emerged, a reunion, and *farz* is now pertinent to *madrasa* and *maktab* alike. A new meaning of *farz* is materialising with only the contours of this new meaning discernible at present. However, the trend is clear and evident, girls' education is increasingly being accepted. Supported by the principle of *farz*, girls' equal right and obligation to education will gradually become recognised, accepted and enacted more widely. The Islamic concept of *farz* is likely the decisive factor that finally will allow girls the same education as boys in *maktab* as well as in *madrasa*.

## Suggestions for Further Studies

The fact that we, the researchers, an Afghan male and a Swedish female, have collaborated throughout this research is in itself, we believe, an important contribution to the conduct of research. The inclination for an insider to be biased and defensive and the tendency for an outsider to be ignorant and culturally insensitive are, to a high degree, possible to avoid in this type of research collaboration. Scientific tools and subject knowledge are, needless to say, prerequisites in all research. The reactions we met from the research community and elsewhere, varied from interest and admiration to suspicion and repudiation, indicating that we were engaged in a very rare experience, cooperation on equal terms. For the benefit of research, particularly in Third World countries, we hope this situation will change.

A number of new research questions and issues have been raised along the way. For example, it would be interesting to do a similar study in an urban setting and compare the findings with those of the present study. It would also be interesting to follow up Sujani and Charbagh after some years, for example 10 years post-2004 interviews asking what has happened to the boys and the girls we spoke to? How do they and their parents and teachers in 2014 look upon the issues discussed in the present study?



The present study has not examined learning achievement and for a future study, such assessment would be valuable, perhaps in relation to socioeconomic backgrounds or teaching techniques. Moreover, there is a great need to study the drop out and repetition rates systematically. Similarly, studies of mosque schools are required and action research during the training of mosques schoolteachers would be a challenging task. The future development of *madrassa* education is also a subject for future research. What will happen to the traditional and the new government *madrassas*? Who will be the students and the teachers? What will be taught and how deep will be student understanding of Islamic issues? Finally, a study with a clear focus on Islamic gender theories might bring more light to understanding gender roles and relations in Afghanistan. In fact, so little is known about education in Afghanistan the need for research is significant and the list of topics is endless.

Finally, to conduct a similar study in Sweden with Amir as outsider and Pia as insider would be another challenging project!

## Glossary

<i>adab</i>	politeness, good manner.
<i>akhlaq</i>	morals or morality
<i>al-Azhar</i>	the Islamic University in Cairo.
<i>amal</i>	practice
<i>aql</i>	wisdom, intellect, mind.
<i>aya</i>	Quranic verse.
<i>burqa</i>	all-covering women dress
<i>chadari</i>	see burqa.
<i>dar-ul-hefaz</i>	Quran school for memorising the Quran.
<i>dastarbandi</i>	completion ceremony of madrasa studies
<i>eobandi</i>	reform movement with roots in British India.
<i>doa</i>	asking Allah for blessing.
<i>farz</i>	Islamic obligation.
<i>fiqh</i>	jurisprudence.
<i>fitra</i>	nature, temperament.
<i>hadith</i>	narrative report of the Prophet Mohammad's sayings and actions
<i>hajj</i>	pilgrimage.
<i>hanafi</i>	one of the four schools of Sunni Islam.
<i>haram</i>	forbidden (in Islam)
<i>haya</i>	honour/shame
<i>hijab</i>	a black cloak from head to foot
<i>ijtihad</i>	literally means 'effort' but has got the meaning of independent judgment in a legal or theological question
<i>imam</i>	prayer leader
<i>iman</i>	conviction, faith
<i>insan</i>	human
<i>Ismailiya</i>	a Shia sect.
<i>jerib</i>	unit of measure for land, equal to 2000 meter square
<i>Jihad</i>	endeavor, strive, holy war
<i>jirga</i>	council, assembly
<i>kafir</i>	infidel, non-believer
<i>kalam</i>	theology
<i>kareez</i>	underground channel, or tunnel, which are excavated and maintained by a series of vertical wells
<i>khair</i>	good, blessing
<i>khalifa</i>	caliph, vicegerent
<i>kuchi</i>	nomad
<i>kuttab</i>	place of writing, also called <i>maktab</i> . Islamic pre-school in Morocco.
<i>landay</i>	popular kind of poem in Pashto

<i>madrasa</i>	a school for Islamic education
<i>mahr</i>	the tradition of a bride price
<i>mahroom</i>	deprived of final grade exam
<i>maktab</i>	school
<i>maktabee</i>	a <i>maktab</i> student or graduate
<i>mansab</i>	a government position with certain authority.
<i>marabouts</i>	originally members of a Muslim Brotherhood in North Africa
<i>maulawi</i>	a mullah with completed Islamic studies
<i>mehrab</i>	a niche in the mosque where the imam stands when leading the prayers.
<i>mir-e-aw,</i>	“head of water” who organises and supervises the distribution of water.
<i>mullah</i>	a male person who has studied Islam in a <i>madrasa</i>
<i>Mujahed</i>	holy fighter.
<i>Mujaheddin</i>	plural of <i>Mujahed</i> .
<i>namus</i>	honour.
<i>pashtunwali</i>	Pashtuns’ codes of conduct
<i>patou</i>	a large shawl used by male
<i>pir</i>	leader of a Sufist brotherhood
<i>purdah</i>	seclusion (literally: curtain).
<i>qadi</i>	judge (in Afghan languages; <i>qazi</i> ).
<i>qari</i>	one who has memorized the Quran
<i>qaum</i>	people, nation, tribe, family, kindred.
<i>sadaqa</i>	charity, sacrifice.
<i>sahib</i>	equivalent to ‘sir’.
<i>Salam Aleikum</i>	peace to you.
<i>Shaitan</i>	Satan
<i>shalwar kameez</i>	male cloth made of a long shirt and wide trousers.
<i>Shariat</i>	the Islamic law (Shariah) in Afghan languages
<i>sharm</i>	shame
<i>shura</i>	council, consultation
<i>sira</i>	the biography of the Prophet.
<i>sufi</i>	revered nickname given to a man
<i>sunna</i>	sayings and actions of the
<i>sura</i>	chapter of the Quran
<i>tadib</i>	instructions of how to behave; proper conduct ( <i>adab</i> ).
<i>tafsir</i>	interpretation of the Quran.
<i>talib</i>	student in <i>madrasa</i>
<i>taliban</i>	plural of <i>talib</i> .
<i>talim</i>	teaching, education.
<i>taqlid</i>	imitation.

<i>tarbiya</i>	education.
<i>tawhid</i>	unity of God.
<i>umma</i>	the world-wide Muslim community.
<i>wahabi</i>	a sect of Sunni Islam
<i>wahy</i>	revelation
<i>waqf</i>	endowment
<i>Wolesi Jirga</i>	literally: people's council; the Parliament.
<i>zakat</i>	almsgiving

In the text, the English form of plural is used



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#### **Interviewed officials:**

Gran, D.M., Director of the Department of Islamic Education, Ministry of Education. January, 2006.

Kashaf, Judge and Director of the Department of Public Security Office of the Supreme Court. April 14, 2005

Mohsini, Religious scholar and political party leader. April 13, 2005

Annexes

Annex 1

Form 1: All households in the village

House nr	Father's name/ address	# of school age boys (boys aged 6-14)	# of school age girls (girl aged 6-14)	Remarks

Etc



## House Nr: .....

1. Adults: (#) Father.... Mother(s).....Grandfather.... Grandmother....  
Others (not children).....
2. Children:

# of children older than 14 yrs		# of children younger than 6 yrs		# of school age children (aged 6-14 yrs)	
Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls

etc

Child number (in birth order)	Children's sex and age (6-14)		Present type of school/grade (year)	Previous type of school/com- pleted grade (year)
	Sex (b/g)	Age		

etc

	PS/years	SS/years	IS/years	VS/years	UV/years	Other/ years
Father						
Mother						

Father										
Mother										
	Small farmer	Small business	Teacher	Mullah	Gov't worker	House-hold work	Artisan	Big business/ big farm owner	Military/police	Other

**D) FAMILY INCOME SOURCES**

	Farming	Business	Salary	House rent	Remittances	Other
Main source (60-100 % of total)						
Bi-source (20-40 %) of total						

**E) ECONOMIC STATUS (as ranked by the father or mother)**

Wealthy	Middle	Poor

## INTERVIEW GUIDE

### 1. Knowledge

**What is knowledge?** Who has what type of knowledge (children, mothers, fathers, grandparents, elders, mullahs, scholars, government officials, teachers, farmers, business men, etc). Difference between knowledge and wisdom? Male and female type of knowledge/wisdom? Difference between theoretical and practical (intellectual and utilitarian/ useful - contextual and decontextual) knowledge? Different kind knowledge in Western and Islamic education?

**How do you get knowledge?** Where? By whom? About Islam? What are the most important things that a teacher in Western and Islamic school should know (teach about)? What are the most important things children learn in Western and Islamic school? Should/Do boys and girls learn different things? What is the best method? Different methods for gaining different types of knowledge?

### 2. Goals

Why does the Government want people to send their children to school? Why does the mullah? Why do parents? Why do you go to school?

**Value/expectation:** What is the use of learning to read and write? What is the use of Western and Islamic education? What is the most valuable thing you have learnt in your life?

**Advantages and disadvantages:** Major advantages and major disadvantages of Western and Islamic education. Choice between Western and Islamic education?

### 3. Teaching and Learning

**Methods:** What are the characteristics of a good teacher? Difference between a female and male teacher? Difference between teaching boys and girls?

What are the most important things children learn in W and I school? Is school success due to teacher, parents or student? Is a student's school success due to ability or effort? What is best: memorising or understanding? What is best: learn from self-experience or guidance from others? Is learning promoted by punishment or praise? How to praise? How to punish?

### 4. Participation

**Reason for selection:** (Parents): Why have you chosen Western-type, Islamic or no education for your children? Are you satisfied with your decision? (Students): Why are you (not) going to Western and or Islamic school? Do you like school a lot or a little?

**Time in school:** (Parents): For how many years do you plan that your sons/daughters stay in school? What decides the length? (Students): How many years do you think you will go to school? How many years do you want? What/who decides how many years you will spend in school?

**Future plans:** (Parents): What do you expect your sons and daughters to do as grown ups? (Student): What will you do as adult?)

### 5. a) Girls

Do boys and girls need the same level and same type (Western and Islamic I) of education? Why/why not? Who should get more education, boys or girls? Who does better in school: boys or girls? How and where do children learn good morals? Different for boys and girls? How do children with good morals behave? Why is *madrassa* not available for girls? Should girls and boys go in the same class? Same school? Why/why not? Is it better for a woman to work outside home or in the household only?

### 5. b) Changes

Have you seen any changes in people's attitudes towards girls' education the last 10 – 15 years? Have you seen any changes in people's interest for Islam/Islamic education the last 10 - 15 years? Have the schools of Western and Islamic education changed in any way since you were a child (25 years ago)? Are girls different today compared to when you were a child? Do people treat girls differently today compared to when you were a child? What will have changed about the Western and Islamic schools in some ten years?

### 6. Misc.

**Decision:** About what do you make decisions in your family? About what does your spouse make decisions? Who has made the decisions about the children's schooling?

**Refugee:** Have you and your family been refugees? Why? Where? When? For how long? Did the children (boys-girls) go to school (Western and/or Islamic) there? If not, why not?

**Religious practice:** Is anyone in your family a mullah? Who? Has anyone in your family been to *Hajj* (made a pilgrimage to Mecca)? Who? When? Does anyone recite the Holy Quran at home? Who? How many *suras* can you memorise? How often do you go to the mosque?

**Books, radio:** How many books (except the Holy Quran) do you have at home? What type?

Newspaper? Do you have a radio? A TV?

**Child rearing:** Whose duty is it to punish the child? How do you usually punish you child? How often? Is it better to have more girls or more boys in a family? Why? Do boys and girls play the same games, with the same toys? What is the best age for marriage for girls? For boys?

**Wife:** Do you/your wife wear a burka when you/she goes to the bazaar? Do you/does your wife contribute financially to the household? If yes, how? Is it better for a woman to work outside home or in the household only?

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